Flying Snake

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A Dorset Wild Cat? • Unidentified Submarine Objects • Cumbrian Parrots • Hong Kong Tiger 1940 • Locusts in Israel•Horned Rats• Chinese Alligator • And more!

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The front cover images were provided by Jonathan McGowan. Thanks.

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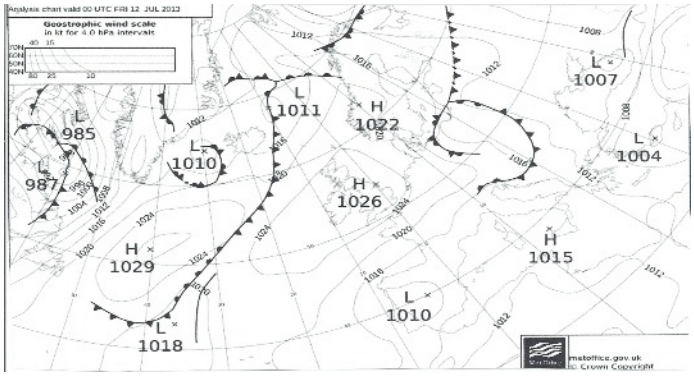
DR DEVOS DIARY

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." Christopher Smart `Rejoice in the Lamb`.Poet,naturalist,lunatic (1722-1771)

Well hello again from the increasingly sub-tropical ambience of Macclesfield (I provide you with the surface synoptic chart for 00 UTC today, 12-7-13 just to prove it!) where wilder-beast frolic in the mid-Summer haze and a dozen hummingbirds flit to and fro besides the dieing buddleia I have neglected to look after about 30 yards beyond this office window.



First of all I am very sorry for the delay in publishing Flying Snake 5,this is because of computer problems,general mayhem and disorganised living (e.g coming home at about 3a.m after clubbing which has taken its toll on my 46 year old mind!) however I hope you enjoy this smorgasbord of cryptozoological goodies. I would like to thank Carl Marshall, Mike Hardcastle,Bob Skinner, Jonathan McGowan,Nick Redfern, and Zvi Ron and the various anonymous newspaper journalists with the long defunct and presumably fossilized North China Daily Herald , Chinese and Western eyewitnesses in late 19th Century Shanghai and the alligators for turning up for their major part in this issue. Flying Snake 6 onwards will be different, A5 size still,30 pages and 6 x a year the same content but PLEASE can I have some female contributors? On June 24th Alan Myers,Devo`s original drummer died,so is this the Beginning of the End of Everything Now or will the Ape Still keep on Regarding it`s Tail? Who knows? I wish Animals and Men a successful re-launch with issue 50 and everyone else known and unknown to me working on cryptozoological projects at present. 2014 should see the publication of Lizzy Clancy and my `Mystery Animals of Old Lancashire` (provincial title) and my Muirhead`s Mysteries blogs in book form. I leave you with that.

A Wild Cat in Dorset 2010

JONATHAN MCGOWAN,MAX BLAKE,RICHARD MUIRHEAD

Whilst at the Weird Weekend in Devon in 2012 I got talking to Jonathan McGowan, a naturalist and taxidermist from Dorset. I was fascinated when he told me he had found a road-kill wild cat kitten near Martin Down in Dorset,which itself is near Cranborne Chase wood because I had visited the former and gone to school in the latter place as a child between 1975 and 1980. This article is about a debate in late 2012 between myself,Jonathan and Max as to the exact identity of this mystery feline. The following pages contain Jonathan`s opinions on the wild cat in Dorset and the whole debate.

Fig 1 Stomach contents of the Dorset "Wild Cat" © Jonathan McGowan

The English wildcat.

Felis sylvestris.

In southern England.

It is not known as to when the species became extinct in southern England. It was one of those assumptions that slowly faded into view over a along time period. Not much was done about it as the wildcat, like other predators at the time were classed as pests and had no conservation status. It was thought that the wildcat disappeared long before the Scottish animals became a conservation talking point. All emphasis was then put on these animals as it was thought that Scotland was the only place where wildcats lived. This was the nineteen sixties. It was later thought that wildcats in southern England had been wiped out before the turn of the century. There was no data on this species here and although there were many records from gamekeepers and landowners during the nineteen twenties, they were overlooked or thought as mistaken identity. The unofficial records came from the hunting and shooting fraternity who would often see or shoot an animal,several reports of wildcats were from rabbiters with ferrets that would bolt the animals into nets,two reports came from the Cranborne Chase area of Dorset during the late nineteen twenties. Several such reports can be seen in various country books and novels such as old game keepers tales and similar books. The hunters would describe a large grey brown tabby looking cat with vertical thin stripes, with a bushy tail that was so ferocious that they could not cut the nets to release them, often just shooting them as they were so tangled up. Wild cats often den up in old fox earths or unused parts of badger setts and it is well known to rabbiters that rabbits often dwell in these places so netting any underground earth that has not got obvious signs of badgers or fox living in it is worth netting and putting down ferrets to flush out possible rabbits. Wildcats were keeping a very low profile, they were being targeted from all sides. They became even more elusive but living in the remote farming areas especially in the hilly regions with lots of thick woodland. So who told everyone that they had become extinct ?

Well it was possibly because there were no real reports from the growing conservation fraternity or naturalists had not encountered them. Secondly, there were so many feral domestic cats about that the chances of them still being around were virtually impossible as genetically thoroughbred animals.

That was the assumption. Cranborne Chase is a large area of remote hilly wooded areas. There is much natural grassland and native broadleaves forest and also planted conifer woodlands. Much of the high areas are uninhabited by people except for farms which are often a long way from the land that is owned. The chase covers the mid county to the north East and so takes in a huge swathe of the county. I have lived on the edge of the chase and spent a lot of time in many of its areas as a child. It is the area where I observed pine martens when I was a teenager, another animal thought to have gone extinct a long time ago. Strangely the two animals overlap in regards to sightings by country folk during the nineteen thirties and forties. During the war, the animals were observed more frequently as game keeping was held back for a while during the war and maybe the remnant populations were able to sustain themselves long enough into later conservation years of the nineteen sixties. When I lived in the area I observed pumas hunting and breeding in the area, and I was the only person who saw these timid shy animals because I was out at night watching owls and badgers. If the local people knew nothing of these naturalized foreign cats, then what hope have they of knowing that wildcats were also present? At night in many areas of Cranborne Chase, one can walk at night through many areas without seeing a human or even a car on the night roads. Any nocturnal animal could be living there unobserved. So comes my encounter which may blend the ideas, or assumption that the wild cat did not perish but still lives on , possibly diluted in terms of genetic purity.

On the morning of the 11 of March 2010 I drove out to search for road killed animals to eat and to use as taxidermy. I often travel on a productive rout which is a fifty mile round route from my base in Bournemouth. Cutting through a small portion of the southern tip of the chase often conjures up many pheasant carcasses on the road as the area is hot in regards to game rearing. There are many dead animals to be had from this area around Sixpenny Handly and Cranborne including stoats, rats, squirrels, three deer species, foxes, badgers rabbits and many hares. Many raptors also get hit on roads such as owls and buzzards. It is also a good area for ravens. So it is an area where many predators still thrive despite the game rearing. I saw a shape in the road outside a large track of forest and fields behind the National nature reserve of Martin Down,

an area of wild natural grassland with much woodland and high biodiversity. I pulled up to the dead animal wondering what it was, and when just a few yards from it I realised that it was a kitten but on picking it up I at once realized that it was no normal tabby cat but had all the hallmarks of being a wildcat ! I bagged it and at home I looked closely at it. It was certainly a kitten, it had a kitten face and was still a bit short in the leg, but as legs go, they were longer than a normal domestic act. The tail was short and slightly tapered just like a wildcat kit. The baring was low down with a gap without bars and the dorsal line was broken up and ended at the tail base. The body consisted of vertical slightly waving thin bands on a grey background. The under fur had a sandy tint to it. The feet were black and it had broad inner leg stripes. The ears had a lighter and dark area more obvious than most domestic cats. Its jaw was broken and what was obvious was the fact that the teeth were still baby teeth, yet the animal was the size of a small female tabby, which meant that when she would have been fully grown, she would have been larger than an average tabby cat. Her fur was very thick, not long in the same way as a long haired cat, but dense, thick hair that I have never found on domestic, not even feral cats. Her body was very chunky and strong. She was broad, unlike domestic cats.

If she had been found in the Scottish highlands, then nobody would have disputed what species it was, in fact I have seen many photographs of alleged wildcats that look more like tabby cats than this specimen that I found. In her stomach were the remains of wood mice, field voles, a rat and a thrush. The remains were parts and not the whole animals suggesting that she had been with either a mother or siblings when eating. She would have been the product of a late litter possibly due to the death of the mother's first litter. I preserved the kitten and still have it now at home with me. I await somebody to do a genetic analysis on her.I have no doubt that wildcats still exist in southern England. I have seen photos of other road killed animals from Devon , Dartmoor to be exact. They look slightly different from my Dorset specimen but it is clear that they have some wildcat in them. Maybe the pure animal disappeared a long time ago but its genes still survive within the most remote areas of southern England, this is the same from Scotland. It is thought that no pure wildcats exist any more, but still the conservation status is hot for the animal. If so, then why has nobody got onto the case of the wildcat in southern England ? surely it is even more deserving of protection. I believe that a lot of it comes from the name 'Scottish wildcat.' It denotes exactly where the animal is found blocking out any other possibilities. Where the animal is found in highland regions of Scotland, it actually prefers the farming areas of mixed fields and woodlands to rugged mountains; Doesn't this suggest something ?

So now the debate:

On November 16th from Mike to me:

Hi.I am a bit annoyed about peoples ideas without knowing all about the cat. the tail is not very pointed and in some of the pics the fur was wet making it seem more pointed, besides, those in the know about wildcats should know that they actually have pointed tail tips until they are at a certain age. those who have read mike Tomkies books will know that and also comparing the pics he took of genuine wildcat kittens and their tails would suggest that they are also pointed until about eight weeks old when they start to bush out. my kitten was about eight weeks old I guess.

On December 3rd 2012 I received the following e-mail from Max Blake:

“ Hi Richard,
I don't know much about wild cats, but I do know some stuff about their genetics.
Wild cats can interbreed with domestic cats, so much so that there are hardly any pure bred wild cats living in the UK. The 'best case' scenarios put the number of pure bred cats in the low hundreds, but other studies have suggested that this is too optimistic and there are actually far fewer than this, possibly lower than 50. Because of this, the majority of wild cats will show some characteristics of domestic cats. As well as this, the opposite is true, so there are domestic cats that look very similar to wild cats.
There are no true wild cats down near Cranborne Chase, so I would hypothesize immediately that it is a domestic cat. Though the body markings are very similar to those on a wild cat, these are highly variable anyway (see the video below). The best visible characteristic for identifying the cat is the tail. It has well defined black bands, and a black tip, a classic wild cat colouration. However, the tail is completely the wrong shape: it is fairly short, thin, and it ends in a taper to a point, completely unlike a true wild cat.
http://scottishwildcats.co.uk/identify.html
Another problem is that there is only one photo, ideally we need a photo of the dorsal side of the animal to analyse. Because of the above, I would encourage you to assume that this is a domestic cat until it is proven other wise because this is the simplest solution. Because the tail

is very wrong for a wild cat, I would say that this is a domestic cat.
What are your plans for the article?
Max.

>From: richmuirhead@ntlworld.com
Date: 03/12/2012 17:51

To: <jrmczoo@tiscali.co.uk>
Subj: CRANBORNE CHASE 2010 WILD CAT

Hi
Jonathan

Just been thinking of that 2010 wild cat kitten, the
photos of which you
sent me. Did you ever have the hairs tested for
DNA?

Jonathan replied: No I did not I was hoping that the Scottish wildcat group may have been able to do it bit as it is not from Scotland I don`t think they were particularly interested but maybe Someone will ! On December 4th the correspondence continued,from Max:

Hi Richard,

Yes I did, I was too busy to reply. As we explained in the talk, we did get the lynx DNA tested, though as we explained there was contamination present as the pelt was extremely old, and it was essentially useless. I am still in contact with the researchers, it cost us nothing as we were working on a paper for it. If you found someone with a database of cat genetic sequences, it would be really easy for them to test it. However, given the virtual impossibility of it being a wild cat, I would guess that they wouldn't be interested (though I would love to be wrong!).

I really think we need more photos of the specimen from various angles to rule out it being at best a hybrid. Based on the one photo, it is still my opinion that the specimen is a normal cat, and is not a hybrid of any sort. We have to rule out this possibility before looking at DNA to give us an identification.

On December 5th 2012 Jonathan sent me this e-mail:

Hi Richard

I am somewhat disappointed with Max`s comments and I do not think it is right to just say it looks like a normal cat. And to think that I would just pick up a dead cat and think that it is a wildcat is equally absurd ! in my career as a naturalist and taxidermist, I have both found and skinned many domestic cats. I pass many dead cats killed on country roads, obviously ferals and think nothing of it. The reason as to why I even stopped at this one was because it was different, not looking like a normal cat. that was it ! and on taking it and looking closely I noticed several interesting points. It was a kitten, albeit very large,it had the markings of a wildcat, and yes I am quite aware that many tabbies also have these more natural markings, but its tail was short and thick its fur was very dense and thick,it had longer legs than a typical tabby, its ear markings were clear, it was chunky, very broad and muscly, its hind feet were also larger than its forefeet. it had several head lines, an indistinct dorsal line that ended above the tail base, basically all the typical wildcat features one could wish for. The size alone makes it unusual! its teeth had not grown and the canine in the bottom jaw was only partly erupted from the jaw. All of these attributes make the animal an exception to the rule, and with the fact that many wildcat looking cats are being found in southern England, along with the area where I found it being the last place in southern England where they were recorded in the past does make it a bit interesting surely ? I have always stated that it could be a hybrid anyhow, even though it looks more like a wildcat that many pictures depicting typical Scottish wildcats ! It may be just an unusual feral moggy but if it is then people must look at the Scottish wildcats in a different light! And other so called wildcats across Europe .Here is another pic of its back, note the chunkiness of it, this is a real feature and is not padded out to look chunky.

Jonathan to me,again, this time on December 6th:

Hi Richard. I just sent Max an email, so its ok, he emailed me earlier.
I`m not too bothered if some folk do think that`s its a normal cat anyhow. I`ve had it for nearly seven years.Moths are eating it and its maybe just a genetic throw back an old typical morph.

And then finally on December 14th:

Hi. I am a bit annoyed about peoples ideas without knowing all about the cat. the tail is not very pointed and in some of the pics the fur was wet making it seem more pointed, besides, those in the know about wildcats should know that they actually have pointed tail tips until they are at a certain age. those who have read Mike Tomkies books will know that and also comparing the pics he took of genuine wildcat kittens and their tails would suggest that they are also pointed until about eight weeks old when they start to bush out. my kitten was about eight weeks old I guess.

Fig 2 The Dorset "Wild Cat" ©
Jonathan McGowan

Early Repots of the Chinese Alligator 1878-1895

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DEC. 21, 1878. The N.-C. Herald and S. C. & C. Gazette.

NORTH CHINA BRANCH, ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

A meeting of the above Society was held at its rooms in the Upper Yuen-ming-yuen road on last Friday, when notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather a fair number of members assembled to hear a paper by Mr. A. A. Fauvel on the Alligators of China. As no other business was before the meeting, the President, Mr. T. W. Kingsmill, at once called on Mr. Fauvel to begin his reading. The author, who had been at pains to illustrate this, the latest accession to our knowledge of the geology of China, exhibited in addition to the stuffed alligator which has been for some months in the possession of the Society, a live specimen obtained in last October from Chinkiang, as well as a cranium and skeleton and a stuffed crocodile for comparison. The paper commenced with a philological dissertation on the names by which the saurians of China have been known at various times, and the specimen on the table, between five and six feet in length, was identified with the t'o 鼉 or ngoh 鰐 of the old writers. Amongst mediæval writers, Marco Polo seems to have been the first to mention the Alligator in China, calling it, however, a serpent, and describing it with many fantastic accompaniments. Later writers have passed ever the animal, and even Du Halde contains no allusion to it. Amongst the moderns, the late Mr. Swinhoe seems to have been the first to allude to its existence; and in 1869 a specimen was exhibited in Shanghai city, and was described in the papers of the day as probably a new species. Père Heude, more recently, was nearly the possessor of a specimen which he only lost through his servant wrangling about a couple of hundred *cash*. At various times reports came down of crocodile-like animals being seen in the Yangtze, and a specimen in the Museum, really an Australian or East Indian one, was supposed to have come from the Yangtsze. Fortunately, the donor was able to indicate the source from whence it came. Mr. L. E. Palm, of I.M. Customs, was, however, the first to obtain a genuine specimen, which arrived in Shanghai at the beginning of last summer, and was presented to the Society. A careful examination soon showed that it was no crocodile, but a genuine alligator, a most interesting fact, as hitherto no alligator has been met with in the old world, the genus being supposed to be confined to the rivers of America.

Mr. Fauvel then explained from the specimens, and by means of careful drawings, the peculiarities of the genus. The Chinese animal seemed to resemble most the Alligator Lucius of the Mississipi, but as it seemed specifically distinct, he proposed in the meanwhile the specific title of Sinensis, until further research should establish or disprove the distinction.

The paper led to an interesting discussion, which elicited some further information as to the occurrence of alligators in China, and the meeting was closed by a vote of thanks to the author, proposed by Mr. Bailey, U.S. Consul-General, which was carried by acclamation.

THE NORTH CHINA HERALD - N.C.D.H.

December 21st 1878

REVIEW.

Journal of the North-China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, New Series No. xiii.—Shanghai, 1879.

The first article in the journal is by Mr. A. A. Fauvel, and is a permanent addition to our knowledge of the Natural History of China. This paper contains all that is known on the subject of alligators in this country, and Mr. Fauvel has the credit of showing that these formidable animals are to be found in the old continent. Up to the publication of this paper, it was believed that alligators were only met with in the Neotropical and Southern part of the Neartic regions, from the lower Mississippi and Texas through all tropical America, but not in the Antilles. Mr. Fauvel has discovered that the alligator, or as the Chinese call it the "earth dragon," is a native of Asia, and has had the distinguished good fortune to send the first *Alligator Sinensis* to the Paris Museum. This single discovery is enough to show that the Natural History department of the N.-C. B. of the Royal Asiatic Society is not inert or useless.

N.C.D.H. October 31st 1879

Swimmers in the Whangpu will be glad to know that the alligator has been captured. It is to be hoped that the River Police will be instructed to see that he is not put back in the river.

N.C.D.H. July 15th 1887

N.C.D.H July 22nd 1887

We are informed that an alligator, who was doubtless making his way to the river, was arrested and nearly killed by two policemen on Broadway at 5 a.m. on Monday. Life in Shanghai will become still more exciting if we are liable to be attacked by these unscrupulous monsters in our streets as well as in our river, and children will have to be sent to school with an armed escort. It is true that these alligators are not very large, but the jaws of one recently caught measured twenty-one inches span when opened, quite enough to give a very effective bite, though it is improbable that they would attack a human being, except in self-defence.

Some days ago Mr. Oelkers, the foreman at Tung-ka-doo Dock caught an alligator on the dock premises. On Monday he saw another, at least eight feet long, lying on the boat slip, but before he could catch it, it escaped into the water. We would therefore advise people to look out well when they go into the river to swim.

It is astonishing how quickly Mr. A. A. Fauvel's monograph on alligators in China, published in Shanghai in 1879, has been forgotten. Mr. Fauvel shews in it that alligators have been known in China from the earliest times. They are mentioned in the "Doctrine of the Mean," among the wild animals living in the waters of China; it is stated that drums are made of their skin, and that the sound given by the drum is like the alligator's roar. They have constantly been found in the Yangtze, and the native writers were well acquainted with their habit of burying themselves in the mud in the winter and coming out in the summer. A very accurate drawing of an alligator, which is reproduced by Mr. Fauvel, used to exist on a marble tablet in *Hai Shen Miao* Temple at Silver Island, and is probably still there, and a live one used to be kept in a pond by the priests. These priests told Mr. Fauvel that alligators are often found in the Yangtze by the native fishermen, in whose nets they become entangled. The Chinese alligator, which Mr. Fauvel decided to be a separate species, and a specimen of which can be seen in the Museum, is a small reptile, averaging only five to six feet in length, and, according to our author, he "appears very slow in his movements being nearly always in a half torpid state; in the summer time when molested he is inclined to bite, but is never first in the attack."

N.C.D.H

July 29th 1887

Our old friend the physiognomist who has his stall at the entrance to the temple to the God of War in the native city, has just published a little pamphlet, which he retails for six cash, on the subject of the appearance of alligators in the Whangpu. The pamphlet which he published some time ago on the injury which foreigners had done to the Fêng-shui of Shanghai, proved that, as an old fashioned literate, he had the greatest contempt for the barbarians from beyond the four seas; and he is now delighted to recognise, in the unwonted appearance of alligators in this river, a sign that the days of foreign occupation are numbered. He has noticed for many years that the natural sphere of the foreigner is the water, and it is on the water—by supplanting the native junks by steamers—that they have done the greatest injury to the natives in Shanghai; and it is therefore proper that the signs of their approaching downfall should come from the water. The alligator is a manifestation of the water dragon; he is therefore one of the tutelary geniuses of the country, and he has displayed himself to prove that the tutelary powers of China have not deserted her. Nothing, he asserts, could have been more appropriate that their appearance this year: we have in sport connected the appearance of these monsters with the Jubilee of the Queen, and what we have done in sport, he does in earnest. In the pride of our hearts we erected an enormous tower to commemorate the completion by our Queen of fifty years of reign; we carried on our rejoicings as freely and unconcernedly as if the land here belonged to us, and we, intentionally to his mind, drew a tacit contrast between the stability of our throne, and the comparatively brief reigns of recent Chinese emperors. Now the Nemesis is upon us, and the water-dragons are sent to warn us, and comfort the hearts of the native conservatives. Everywhere he hears, and his habit of extracting information from all the visitors to his stall keeps him well informed, that even in our own base and mechanical arts his countrymen are rapidly superseding us. The land is covered with a network of telegraphs, railways are being built by the Chinese, China's armies are as powerful as those of any Western power, while her navy is already superior in numbers to any foreign squadron in the China seas, and will soon be still stronger. He is ready to allow that in the reign of Hien-fêng a lethargy had fallen on China, and she required waking up; the instrument chosen being the rough and violent barbarian. Now that she has been aroused, and has renewed her youth, and all uncertainty as to her future is dispelled, with such men as Li and Chang and Tsêng at the helm, the barbarian is no longer a necessary evil, and he is glad to be able to announce to the over-ridden and long-suffering denizens of Shanghai that the rule of the barbarians draws to a close, and that the appearance of alligators in the Whangpu, is as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. We have merely given a rough sketch of his conclusions; it would be too tedious a task to follow his reasoning, his proofs being derived from his interpretation of the arrangement of the scales on the water-dragon's back; proofs which are incontrovertible to anyone who has made the Pa-kwa one of the studies of his life. It was certain that studious Chinese would find some mystical meaning in the sudden appearance of these reptiles in our river; our writer's explanation is a very natural one, and we hear that his pamphlet is having a large sale and that the Shanghai Tract Society is about to publish and distribute an antidote to it.

There is a wide-spread belief in the power of some animals to take other forms, as the fox can take the form of a young and beautiful girl, rats can change to bats, sparrows to tree-frogs, kites to pigeons. Fire-flies are transformed, according to popular belief, from rotten plants, and there are numberless other transformations believed in ; but hitherto, although sharks have been known to change to tigers, there had been no instance recorded of the reverse process having taken place, and a tiger turning into a shark.

Early this month a man at Ch'ao-chow Fu, a large town in Canton province, up the Han or "Swatow River," some 40 miles from Swatow, a returned emigrant from Singapore, began to miss his pigs, fowls, dogs, etc., and at first suspected that some human agency was at work in the person of a poor neighbour, until the presence of blood, fur and feathers on the ground showed that a wild beast was the robber. So he dug a pit-fall and lay in wait.

One evening at twilight, sure enough, a large animal came prowling round and tumbled into the pit, and on going out to see, he found he had made a prisoner of a tiger. He and his friends after great trouble, got it into a cage, and were intending to send it to Singapore as a present to the British Governor ; but the tiger in cage displayed such terrible fury, roaring, clawing and biting, that, fearing it would burst out, they determined to weight the cage with stones, sink it in the river, drown the tiger, and then take off its skin.

They sunk the tiger, cage and all, and the next day hauled it up, when to their amazement there was no dead tiger in the cage, but a live alligator, and the tiger's empty skin lay in one corner. They took the alligator home in the cage and killed it, and sold the skin. Have not we all met some people, fierce and cruel in life, unreformed until the hour of death, and are they likely in a future state of existence to assume a better change than this Swatow tiger ! The tale, though it may not be true, has thus its moral.

N.C.D.H. May 15th 1895

Mr. W. B. Pryer writes as follows to the North Borneo Asiatic Society :—My name having been mentioned in connection with the discovery of the only alligator existing in Asia it may be interesting to some of your readers if I describe how it occurred. I was Curator of the Shanghai Museum for some twenty months or more from 1874 to 1876 and some time during this period a reptile was brought. I turned up Gunther's *Reptiles of British India* and other authorities and somewhat reluctantly came to the conclusion that it was an alligator ; that a live alligator could occur in the Yangtse seeemed impossible in the face of Gunther's want of mention of a single species in Asia anywhere. But some one suggested that it might have been brought over in a ship and then escaped or been bought by a Chinaman and freed in the same way that they free turtles, and with this explanation we had to be content ; but after a lapse of some months a second one was brought. This seemed very remarkable indeed, but one swallow does not make a summer, and two alligators seemed rather slender evidence on which to flaunt the American genus *alligator* in the face of all the authorities as an inhabitant of the old world. So nothing was done, and just before I left China a third specimen was obtained, but I was too busy to give any attention to it. To the best of my recollection none of these specimens were over six feet long, and if I remember rightly the first one was brought in by some one connected with one of the River steamers. As the occurrence of crocodiles at sea has been noted in the *Field* once or twice as rather strange, it may be interesting to mention that at least one species in Malaya is a salt-water one solely and may be found anywhere where there are islands although they may be some miles from the mainland ; it is much darker in colour than any fresh-water species I have seen.

N.C.D.H.

August 20th 1895

An alligator was caught in the river on Monday by some of the sailors belonging to H.M.S. *Esk*. The saurian is between seven and eight feet long, and takes kindly to pork and passes a listless existence in a bath tub.

CHINKIANG.

Our little Settlement was somewhat startled on Wednesday afternoon by a report that an alligator had been caught in the Yangtsze opposite the Settlement. The occurrence was so extraordinary that at first few of us gave credence to the report, but seeing is believing; and, thanks to the kindness of its captor, I am now able to send you the following particulars of our strange visitor.

At about 1 p.m. of the afternoon in question, one of our community, who happened to be on board the China Navigation Company's hulk *Cadiz*, saw a black object floating in the water, and drifting down with the tide. It was at the time supposed to be a seal, and four of the hulk coolies gave pursuit in a small sampan. On coming up with the chase, there was a great deal of "Ai-yahing,' amongst the pursuers, and one man, raising a bamboo, struck a blow at the head of the beast, which, however, had no other effect than causing it to dive and disappear from view. About half an hour afterwards the animal was again seen, and, as before, floating on the water, by a lady and gentleman who were returning from a visit to Silver Island, but they passed it at some distance, and its true character was not suspected. The alligator (for such we now know it to be) appears then to have drifted down with the stream until opposite the Consular Bluff, when, presumably trying to reach the shore, it was caught by the up current and floated up to the Hulk of the S. S. N. Co. Here Mr. R. Talbot Williams espied it, and getting together some of his boatmen, gave chase in a gig. Our friend seemed to be perfectly unaware of the approach of his enemies, and made no effort to escape until the noose of a rope was securely made fast to his tail, when he immediately dived, but being caught up with a round turn, came again to the surface, and lashed his huge tail again and again in his happily futile efforts to escape. Finding this weapon of no avail, the animal brought its voracious jaws into play, and made strenuous efforts to burst its bonds. But all was in vain, and the prize was dragged ashore in triumph. I had the pleasure of seeing the monster this morning, and an uglier brute I hope never to meet with. From the tip of its nose to the extremity of the tail it measures 6 feet 4 inches, and its weight is close on 200 lbs. It is now placed in a small artificial pond in the American Consulate, where it lies apparently contented, for it makes no effort to escape. When disturbed, by the prodding of bamboos, sticks, &c., (we do not like to venture too close) it raises its ugly head; and the vicious look of the eye, combined with the ominous crash of the huge jaws as it brings its formidable teeth together, make one spring back with a sense of fear. Of course, every one is anxious to see it, and I hear that it has been presented to some Chinese, who will probably make a good sum by exhibiting it.

Now as to how our stranger got here we are all conjecture, for we believe—in the absence here of any zoologist of repute—that reptiles of this species have hitherto been quite unknown in the Yangtsze waters. The most likely story I have heard concerning the beast is this. About five years ago Messrs. Canny & Co.'s Compradore purchased—from whom I am not able to ascertain—two young crocodiles (鰐魚) or alligators, which he presented as a gift to the priests on Silver Island, to be turned into the river, but with what purpose the request was made is best known to the donor. These beasts then measured respectively 3 ft. and 4 ft., so that if this be one of the animals that were cast adrift in the river as stated, their growth must be very rapid. For my part, I hope it will be proved that it is, and I am sure few of us have any wish to discover that the Yangtsze is inhabited with any reptiles so formidable as alligators or crocodiles.

W. B. R.

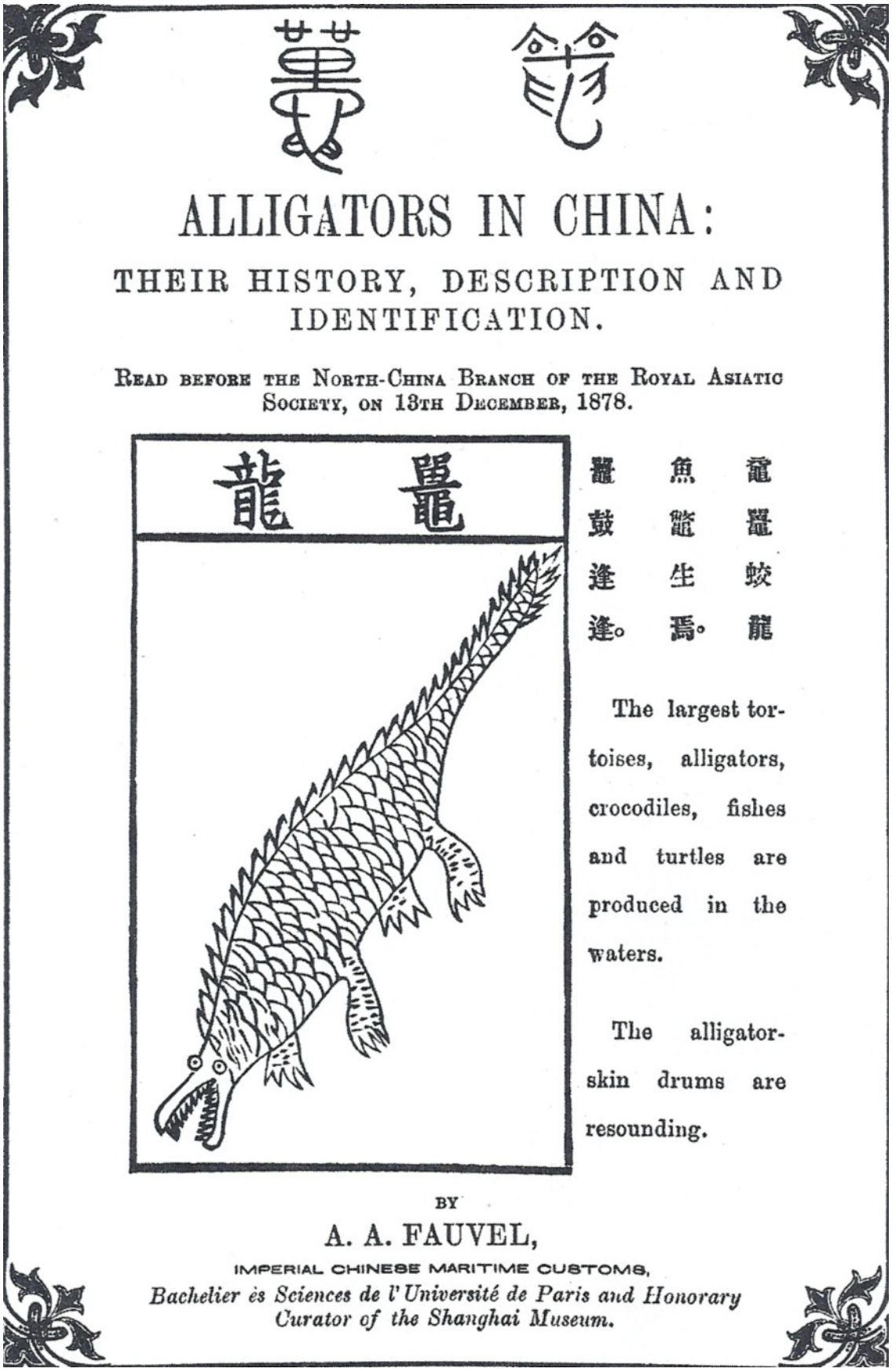
Date Unknown

We must "go from home for news." Whence or how, we wonder, did the *Daily Telegraph* get the following. Certainly not from the *Peking Gazette*, so far as we know anything of its contents. Perhaps this cock and dragon story has arisen, however, from the discovery of an alligator in the Yangtsze near Chinkiang last summer:—

"From the *Peking Gazette* we have news of a really wonderful creature in the possession of a fortunate Chinaman at Shanghai. It is described as a veritable river dragon, eighteen feet long, and it has, we are told, the head of a fox, two claws in front like those of a lion, is of the colour of a toad, and when irritated roars with a dreadful sound. In point of appetite it is positively voracious, for when a chicken was handed it for breakfast it swallowed the bird at a gulp. Very naturally the Chinese by whom it was captured show great veneration for the monstrosity, and flock in numbers to worship it. The only question which remains is what shall be done with this remarkable denizen of the water. To transport it to England would be a work of supererogation; there is no necessity to introduce anything into our rivers at home that will destroy the fishes, the present practice of allowing the waste waters from factories and the sewage of towns to flow into our streams being quite sufficient to prevent anything bordering on an excess of vitality. Even the Brighton Aquarium could scarcely accommodate a monster eighteen feet long which takes down fowls at a gulp, and to let the creature loose again upon the ocean would be a sad and dangerous experiment. Yet it is clear that such a wonder ought not to be lost sight of. Who knows the mysteries that might be unravelled by a phenomenon which closely allies fishes, lions, and toads! Clearly the advocates of the evolution theory ought to lose no time in possessing themselves of the animal."

North China Daily Herald

Date Unknown



ALLIGATORS IN CHINA:

THEIR HISTORY, DESCRIPTION AND IDENTIFICATION.

READ BEFORE THE NORTH-CHINA BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY, ON 13TH DECEMBER, 1878.

龍 黿

黿 魚 電
鼓 鼉 黿
逢 生 蛟
逢。 焉。 龍

The largest tortoises, alligators, crocodiles, fishes and turtles are produced in the waters.

The alligator-skin drums are resounding.

BY

A. A. FAUVEL,

IMPERIAL CHINESE MARITIME CUSTOMS,

Bachelier ès Sciences de l'Université de Paris and Honorary Curator of the Shanghai Museum.

Fig 1. A.A. Fauvel wrote the first serious Western study of the Chinese Alligator

A Modern Plague of Locusts in Israel

Zvi Ron

A Modern Plague of Locusts in Israel
By Zvi Ron

Beginning in March, 2013, waves of locusts began swarming into Israel, crossing the border from Egypt through the Sinai Desert. The swarm first appeared near Cairo on March 2, and then descended on Israel on March 6. The Israeli Agriculture Ministry sprayed pesticides heavily in the Negev region, the southern part of the country, both on land and in the air. [1] The tens of millions of locusts that swept into Egypt over that weekend prompted the Agriculture Ministry to issue a "locust alert". [2] No preventative pesticide can be used in advance of a locust's arrival, and effective spraying can only occur once the insects are settled on the ground for the night or in the early morning before they fly off, the ministry explained, so there was not much to do until the swarms entered the country. [3] After the initial waves of locusts were for the most part eradicated, a new swarm entered Israel on March 27, during the Passover holiday. [4] The major swarms were decimated by the Ministry of Agriculture and only small amounts were left, which were considered relatively harmless. Locusts were reported in central Israel, for example Tel Aviv, and even as far north as Haifa. [5] By the end of Passover, the locust danger had mostly passed, and no major agricultural damage was reported from the Negev region. Still, the Ministry of Defense is helping the farmers in that area destroy the remaining locusts, in order to prevent losses. [6]

The last time Israel fought off a locust plague was in 2005, and swarms of locusts are not that unusual in the region. What made this swarm particularly intriguing was its timing, right about the time of Passover, celebrated this year from the evening of March 25-April 1. This led to many comparisons in news outlets comparing the current swarms to the eighth plague of locusts that struck Egypt before the exodus. [7] Though the timing is uncanny, researchers note that the current plague is a normal ecological phenomenon, and it was not interpreted locally as a form of divine punishment. In the Middle East, locusts typically swarm every 10 to 15 years, and although the pattern can be unpredictable, certain natural factors were identified as contributing to the swarming. In this case, a very rainy winter caused excessive vegetation growth in the region, which resulted in a boom in the locust population. [8] Although some Christian websites pushed the idea that

this is somehow an apocalyptic sign [9], no parallels to this appeared in Jewish rabbinic forums, which if they mentioned it at all urged inquirers not to panic. [10] In Israel, although farmers were concerned, the general public was amused by the odd coincidence in terms of timing and the opportunity to taste locust.

The Bible (Lev. 11:20-23) permits certain types of locusts to be eaten. Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef ruled that these locusts, part of the *Acrididae* family that includes grasshoppers, are in fact kosher and may be eaten, but only for those who have a tradition of eating them. Over many centuries, most Jews stopped eating locusts for cultural and sociological reasons, and the tradition of exactly which kind may be consumed was forgotten, and there is virtually no record of the kosher status of locusts in religious texts. However some, such as Yemenite Jews, who used to eat them skewered on shish-kebabs and baked with a light sprinkling of salt, maintained the tradition of which ones are permitted. Some adventurous chefs took advantage of the swarms to prepare various locust centered delicacies. [11]

It should be noted that although the plague of locusts indeed preceded the Biblical Exodus, it was the eighth plague out of ten and occurred some time prior to the Israelites leaving Egypt (Ex. 10:1-20), thus there is no inherent connection between the plague of locusts and the date of Passover.

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7. "Bible comes to life as locusts swarm Israel - Israeli Jews celebrating Passover will easily relate to their ancestors this year – the country has been swarmed by millions of locusts, one of the 10 plagues visited on the Egyptians", Christian Science Monitor, March 27, 2013. "Fertile locusts swarm into Israel on Passover eve arriving with Biblically resonant timing, latest arrivals are ready to reproduce", Times of Israel, March 24, 2013

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8. "The Bad News: Just in Time for Passover, Plague of Locusts Arrives in Israel", American Friends of Tel Aviv University, March 25, 2013. The current swarm was reported as "a powerful testimony to the world that the Passover story is real and not legend", "Locusts!", Israel Today, April 2013.

9. "A Million Locust swarm hits Israel, Passover plague Fuels apocalyptic fears are the ten Biblical plagues being imposed on Egyptians by God", Count Down to Zero Time, March 8, 2013. The following message from the founding editor of Breaking Christian News, Steve Shultz, was posted on their website on March 4, 2013, "Locusts in Egypt and even into Israel brings to mind the plague of the locusts in Egypt prior to Exodus and also prior to the first Passover. Now, this plague in Egypt is also just prior to Israel's Passover. Jesus said there would be "signs in the Heavens and Earth" right up until the end of the age. The reader may want to follow this story to see if this sign reveals any insight. Note that even the secular news media is making a connection with the Biblical accounts of the plague of locust and the first Passover."

Fig 1 Map of Egypt and E. Mediterranean region showing "invasion" route of locusts. Provided by Zvi Ron

10. ***http://rabanim.net/?nav=send&searchnow=%20%EE%EB%FA%20%E0%F8%E1%E4%20%E1%E9%F9%F8%E0%EC***

11. 3rd wave of locusts from Sinai takes Israel by swarm", Jerusalem Post, March 11, 2013.

Bornean Crocodile Folklore

Carl Marshall

The *Orang Sungei* (river people) know many legends featuring the crocodile. In one of these tales, related by the elders of Bukit Garam, a peaceful co-existence is claimed between the *Orang Sungei* and the estuarine crocodile. This myth also credits these giant reptiles with the ability to speak.

While staying at the Kinbatangan river I was told the following story:
Terrunggari - the giant white crocodile.
The *Orang Sungei* speak of a giant white crocodile named *Terrunggari* that once lived in the Kinabatangan river. One day *Terrunggar*i grabbed a local boy while he was swimming and dragged him to the mouth of the Kinabatangan, where he told the boy he wanted him to witness a duel he was about to have with another massive crocodile named Berlintang. Berlintang ruled the sea, but he also wanted control of the rivers and *Terrunggari* was all that stood in his way. *Terrunggari,* the white crocodile told the boy that if he saw red blood in the river after the battle, it would mean he had won and that all would be safe in the Kinabatangan, but if he saw white blood it would mean *Terrunggari* had been defeated and that *Berlintang* and all the crocodiles of the sea would rise up, attack and devour the *Orang Sungei.*

The battle between these massive crocodiles took place, and eventually the boy saw red blood float up from the depths, followed by the dead *Berlintang*. The boy then returned home and informed the rest of his village that *Terrunggari* and his river crocodiles had won the battle and the right to stay in the Kinabatangan, and that man could continue to live in harmony with them.
Of course this charming story belongs firmly in the realm of mythology as early travellers reported that attacks were frequent in this area and are occasionally still reported to this day.

Fig 1 Crocodile at Kinabatangan River

Fig 2 Crocodile at Kinabatangan River

Carl`s Fortean Spider Experience in Borneo

Carl Marshall

After a tediously long flight from Heathrow via Dubai we finally arrived in Brunei; from there we travelled by four wheel drive into Tanjung Simpang Mengayau, in the state of Sabah, also known as the tip of Borneo. We stayed here for several days to acclimatise to the unfamiliar conditions before we travelled back further south into deeper, more impenetrable jungle. Even though we didn't see much large wildlife in this area of Borneo we did hear that sunbears are sometimes found here but we were not fortunate in seeing any! We did find some very impressive invertebrates one of which, on our return, proved to be a rather interesting find and our experiences with this species were truly fortean in nature.

On our second night at camp, just after a long thunderstorm, Andrew Jackson, my colleague from the Butterfly Farm, was quietly playing the David Bowie classic *A Space Oddity* on his I pod (note this for further reference in the following paragraph), while I was reading Bernard Heuvelman's authoritative work, *On The Track Of Unknown Animals*, when my concentration was broken by a familiar movement to the left of my peripheral vision. It was a fairly large orange sparassid spider of the pantropical genus *Heteropoda* running at high speed across the floor in the direction of our makeshift kitchen, and only when it finally paused could we briefly view it more clearly. It was a relatively large specimen about 2.5 - 3.0 cm across, with a pale cephalothorax (fused body and head) and abdomen covered with distinctive orange hairs that were also on each of the spiders eight appendages. It had dark chelicerae (mouthparts) and a dark dorsal stripe running vertically from the spiders eyes all the way down, almost to the tip of the abdomen. We viewed it for about three minutes before it disappeared out of view into a crack, and after leaving it alone we thought nothing more of it until we arrived back in the UK when we started identifying encountered species.
It seems that our Huntsman spider most closely resembles a newly discovered species known taxonomically as *Heteropoda davidbowie* -

- yes a species of spider has been formally named the David Bowie's spider! - apparently named after the rock star in an attempt to raise public awareness of the increasing number of arachnid species facing extinction. Our encounter with this spider might also be of importance as *H. davidbowie* is known from western (peninsular) Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Sumatra and maybe also southern Thailand and to my knowledge is *not* known from anywhere on the island of Borneo.

Within my profession I have worked with a variety of species from the genus *Heteropoda*, studying many live specimens and after comparing what we witnessed at camp with the formally identified Bornean species, I am now contemplating the possibility that *H. davidbowie,* if its numbers do not drastically decline, might also be discovered in Borneo.

With our appetites whetted for further exploits, next year Andrew and I return to Borneo on the hunt for giant pythons and also Borneo's answer to Orang pendek, the equally elusive Batutut but while there we shall certainly be searching for this mystery arachnid.

Borneo`s Mystery Animals - Report of a Visit in March 2013

Carl Marshall

Borneo is the third largest island in the world and the largest island in Asia. It is located north of Java, west of Sulawesi, and east of Sumatra. At 130 million years old, Borneo has some of the oldest rainforests in the world. There are about 15,000 species of flowering plants with 3,000 species of trees of which 267 species are *dipterocarps*. Borneo has 221 species of terrestrial mammal and 420 species of resident birds. There are about 440 freshwater fish species which is about the same as Sumatra and Java combined, 149 of them are endemic to Borneo.

The Borneo rainforest is one of the only remaining natural habitats for the Borneo orangutan and is an important refuge for many endemic forest species, including the Asian elephant, the Sumatran rhinoceros, the Borneo clouded leopard, the Hose's civet and the dayak fruit bat.

In March 2013 my colleague and I from the Stratford upon Avon Butterfly Farm travelled into the interior of Malaysian Borneo to study its ecology and biodiversity and were lucky enough to encounter many endangered species such as the forest elephant, the slow loris, pig-tailed macaaque and many unique chiroptera species.

Not only were we looking for any evidence of rare, known fauna, we were also inquiring after cryptozoological species. The list below contains some hitherto undocumented reports.

[1]Giant saltwater crocodile: A soldier informed us of a colossal 35ft crocodile he had witnessed near Lok Batik, Sabah.

[2]Giant reticulated pythons: Our guide from Ulu Kamanis informed us of giant pythons 30ft +. More research on these in 2014.

[3]luminous paradise type birds: We were informed by Matthew Lazenby of glowing paradise type birds in the deep forests of Ulu Kamanis.

[4]Giant black orangutan: We were informed of Indonesian giant black orangutans - more on these in 2014

[5]Sabah sky rods: Matthew Lazenby has done much research on the flying rod phenomenon. He has taken part in a reconnaissance of a deep cave, that after viewing back the video footage, shows very strange flying objects that Matthew claims have different flight patterns to moths filmed using extremely short exposure times. We will meet with Matthew (Jigger) again in 2014 and shall hopefully have further updates on this strange phenomena.
[6]Batatut: The Bornean orang pendek is named the Batatut. I found no evidence of this cryptid from Malaysian Borneo! Further research on this creature in 2014 expedition to Indonesian Borneo.
[7]Possible OOP *H.davidbowie*: While staying at Tampat Du Aman we briefly witnessed a *Heteropoda sp* that closely resembled *H. davidbowie*, a species supposedly only found in peninsular Malaysia - could this species also be found in Borneo? We will investigate this further in 2014.

[8]OOP long arm scarab beetles: Max Blake of the CFZ informed me last year that because of the distribution of many species of Euchirinae, specimens might be found in the middle east and incredibly on Borneo. No evidence as yet! More research on this in 2014.
This list will no doubt be updated in 2014 when we return to Borneo for our follow up expedition - next time mainly researching Indonesian Borneo.

Fig 1 Pygmy elephant © Carl Marshall

Fig 2 Southern pig tailed macaque *Macaca nemestrina* © Carl Marshall IMG 1893

Fig 3 Female probiscous monkey with baby *Nasalis larvatus* © Carl Marshall IMG 2027

WERE SOME FLYING SNAKES REALLY PEACOCKS?

Richard Muirhead

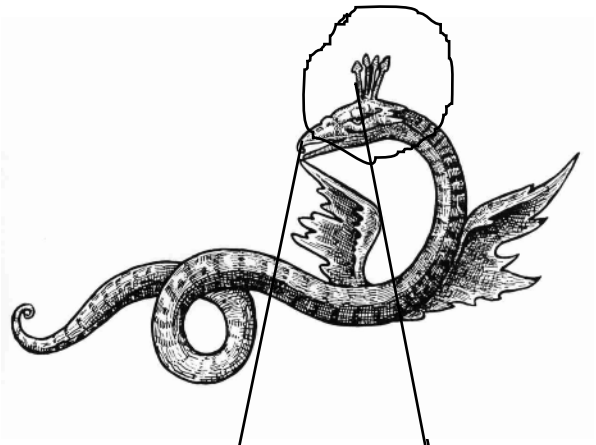

Fig 1 Flying snake as depicted by Crispjin de Passe, early 17th Century.

Fig 2 Head of a peacock .

Wikipedia Creative Commons.

I wish to talk here about the possibility that some flying snakes were actually peacocks, rather than pheasants as suggested by Dale Drinnon,although to be fair on Dale he did mention peacocks.(1) I am not ruling out the possibility that *some* flying snakes were really pheasants mistakenly identified as flying snakes,but I am suggesting that the possibility that the flying snakes reported to inhabit the woods and culverts around

Penllyne Castle in Glamorgan,Wales were very probably pet peacocks which had at one point in time escaped from the immediate grounds of that Castle. After all the ring necked pheasant,of the kind normally seen in Wales doesn`t have the upstanding feathers on its head as in the flying snake depicted in `America` by Crispijn de Passe (see page 37) as does the peacock, nor would there be anything exceptional and surprising about a rustic person in late 19th /early 20th South Wales seeing a pheasant ,so why make any comment on it to visiting folklorists such as Marie Trevelyan who made the be-jeweled "snakes" popular amongst contemporary cryptozoologists? The pheasant has been known in Wales since Tudor times, 1485-1603.(2) "In Glamorgan the Pheasant was evidently scarce or unknown until towards the close of the eighteenth century, since in 1781 Thomas Mansel Talbot was awarded a gold medal by the Glamorganshire Agricultural Society for his spirited endeavours to introduce the English Pheasant into this county…"(3) It is a well known fact that even up to the present day peacocks have been kept as attractions in the gardens of British country estates and it is by no means beyond the bounds of possibility that during a storm,or civil unrest,or deliberately for one reason or another a number of these wonderful peafowl escaped and even bred. Pheasants may have been kept and raised as game. Admittedly, officially there never have been peafowl in N,America. But could they not have been transported there as pets or food? The first Welsh are rumoured to have reached North America in the form of the Welsh prince Madoc in 1170. He founded a colony which mixed with Native Americans. Interestingly, the painting or engraving `America` mentioned above,shows the flying snake/"peacock" in its proper context, that of just one animal amongst many. Does this mean that rather than peafowl ,flying snakes were common in North America in the 1600s?

Between 1541 and 1556 the Italian naturalist Hieronymus Benzo wrote in his journal during a visit to Florida :" I saw a certain kind of Serpent which was furnished with wings, and which was killed near a wood by some of our men. Its wings were so shaped that by moving them it could raise itself from the ground and fly along, but only at a very short distance from the earth." (4)

Peacocks can only fly short distances. Also, remember the long snake-like tails of peacocks.

On May 7th 2013 I posted the image on page 37 on the `Cryptozoology` Facebook Forum with the question: " Has anyone worked out what the "flying snake"/basilisk here could be (in Crispijn de Passe`s America)? It is usually not seen in its context with other animals commonly known." Here are the most relevant responses:

Stuart Paterson: It`s a 16th century mannerist[1] painting by van de Passe, idealising the American continent. Therefore, the bestiary is partially imagined, partly based on the reports of others & partly indicative of the sort of things imagined to be there.

Adam Kukoleck: How about it being a once commonly known basilisk?

Victor Vasquez: Because they look like they may be cannibals of some sort I would imagine that they are a European representation of Central American Natives such as the Aztec. The flying serpent under the foot might represent Quetzalcoatl or even Lucifer since they were seen as evil for their blood sacrifices. Maybe even a reference to Isaiah 30:6 .That Bible quote was often used against a people to say their riches do not belong to them & can be taken away because they are evil & against God.

I find the imagery some sort of propaganda against the First People of the Americas.

Martin Kilmer-True: To be fair, the Aztec empire WAS absolutely batshit insane.

Mike Richardson To be boring , what if it was just the remains of a bat? I could see how a description of a bat plus some remains could be inspiration for a winged snake.

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[1] Mannerist : An artistic style of the late 16th century characterized by distortion of elements such as scale and perspective.

Richard Muirhead: Have there ever at all been any reports of peafowl in America?

Stuart Paterson: Not till the late 19thC. However, as I said earlier, European mannerist painting at that time imagined animals and `cryptids` in little explored lands. I suggest this is that. What`s more intriguing is Gauguin`s mystery bird, some sort of rail perhaps, as he painted at Hiva Oa.

Rowson Zhen: I believe that is exactly what it is depicting, a snake with wings.Ancient historians quite often depict dragons as reptiles, especially as pythons and boas but a few have mentioned “dragons with wings” .If you were to look at the “evolutionary record” of snakes, you`d find that prehistoric snakes came in a plethora of forms and possessed different physical traits. Some had legs, some had flippers (specimens of both have been discovered) and these ancient historians mentions them as well .Along with this, there are varieties of ones with wings. Unfortunately, snakes do not fossilize easily so much of the fossil record remains incomplete and there are many missing links and branches depicting their lineage. But it is quite conceivable that some might have wings, for either gliding or flying. Btw, it is also worth noting that there has been and still exists snakes with beaks.

Rowson Zhen: Even contemporary snakes have horns,tentacle protrusions, leaf like protrusions, etc. I wouldn`t doubt it at all of prehistoric snakes having feather like protrusions. As of now, only a few species of contemporary snakes have beaks and all are ocean dwelling so they don`t have feathers.

John DeSilva: I believe the quetzal (from Central American folklore) was described as a feathered flying and is in actuality a long tailed bird…

Fig 3

Crispijn de Passe`s `America`

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(There are reports of feral peacocks in Britain, see: http://www.thewatchforum.co.uk/index.php?showtopic=79312 about a case in December 2012 in Cambridgeshire. On December 4th 2007 Wales Online reported that peafowl were escaping into Cardiff from Cardiff Castle.)

1. Dale Drinnon. Flying Snakes Parts 1 and 2 in Flying Snake vol 1no 1 pp 20-23 and vol 1 no 2 pp 13-17.
2. The Pheasant in Wales http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/search?model=pdf&id=3742
3. Ibid.
4. Yahoo question and answer forumhttp://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110823054106AAH9bLj

SOME NOTES ON THE DEER OF HONG KONG

RICHARD MUIRHEAD

Fig 1 Spotted deer (Axis deer) in a zoo on Lantau Island from The Star newspaper of July 29th 1977. I am sorry about the poor quality of the above

In the 1860s, axis deer were introduced to the island of Molokai, Hawaii, as a gift from Hong Kong to King Kamehameha V. Today the deer are found plentiful on Lanai, another of the Hawaiian Islands. The Paniolos (cowboys) were instructed to lasso the deer from Molokai and to bring them for shipping to Lanai. Hawaii wildlife officials believe people have flown the deer via helicopter and transported them by boat onto the island. (1) I have never seen this mentioned in any standard book on Hong Kong`s fauna, past or present.

According to Introduced Mammals of the World `Axis deer `(Chital) from India have been introduced and established in the Hawaiian islands (Gottschalk 1967; Tomich 1969.) In 1867, seven axis (three males and four males) were shipped to the reigning monarch of Hawaii as a gift from his envoy in Japan. Some of these came from the Upper Ganges River.India, but some died on the voyage and were replaced at Hong Kong *with animals of unknown origin* (2) [Emphasis my own.]

Jon told me on June 8th that within the last 10 years some have come to believe that there are two species of muntjac in Hong Kong, Reeves muntjac and the Indian muntjac. This is interesting given the possible importation during the days of the East India Company (1600-1874) of the axis deer (see above) or Chital deer from India,Bangladesh,Sri Lanka,Nepal or Bhutan to Hong Kong sometime between the early 1840s and 1860s. This is my theory anyway. The image on the previous page is of a chital, found in the Hong Kong newspaper The Star on July 29th 1977. There was a small herd of the deer on Lantau island then. So was there a continual population overlooked in Hong Kong for about 100 years?

The Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London for 1864 mentions the following:

“In the gardens of Messrs. Jardine,Matheson,and Co. In Hong Kong I saw several bucks and does of C.sika and C.taivanus, and also of C.axis in winter dress. The bucks of the two former had manes about the neck;C.sika was spotless, C.taivanus with indistinct spots, while C.axis was of a rich yellowish-brown colour, with distinct white spots. The latter had long,thin,reddish tails,and,I think,are identical with the true C.axis. They are from Hankow,interior China. The bucks of C.sika, otherwise similar,

differed a good deal in size; they were, I believe, from different islands of Japan, the smaller from Nippon, the larger from Yesso.

“The Deer from China may therefore be enumerated, as follows:-

Cervus dama, L. In gardens at Canton.

C.axis, L. From Hankow, Central China.

C elaphus, L. Summer Palace Gardens.

C wallichii. Tartary, beyond the Great Wall (horns seen by me at Peking)

C swinhoii, Sclater. Island of Formosa

C hortulorum , Swinhoe (“ C pseudaxis”? , Gray). Gardens of Summer Palace.

C taivanus, Blyth. Island of Formosa.

C sika. Island of Japan.

C mantchricus. Mantchuria (sic) Size larger than C taivanus, with horns short in stem, and more resembling those of C sika Colouring very similar (in winter coat) to that of C taivanus. Red patch on occiput, on each shoulder, and on side of neck. Black line down back somewhat indistinct; mane from side and back of neck rather long,thick, shaggy,and dark-coloured. Belly pale reddish white. Thighs light reddish brown.” (3)

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Horned Rats

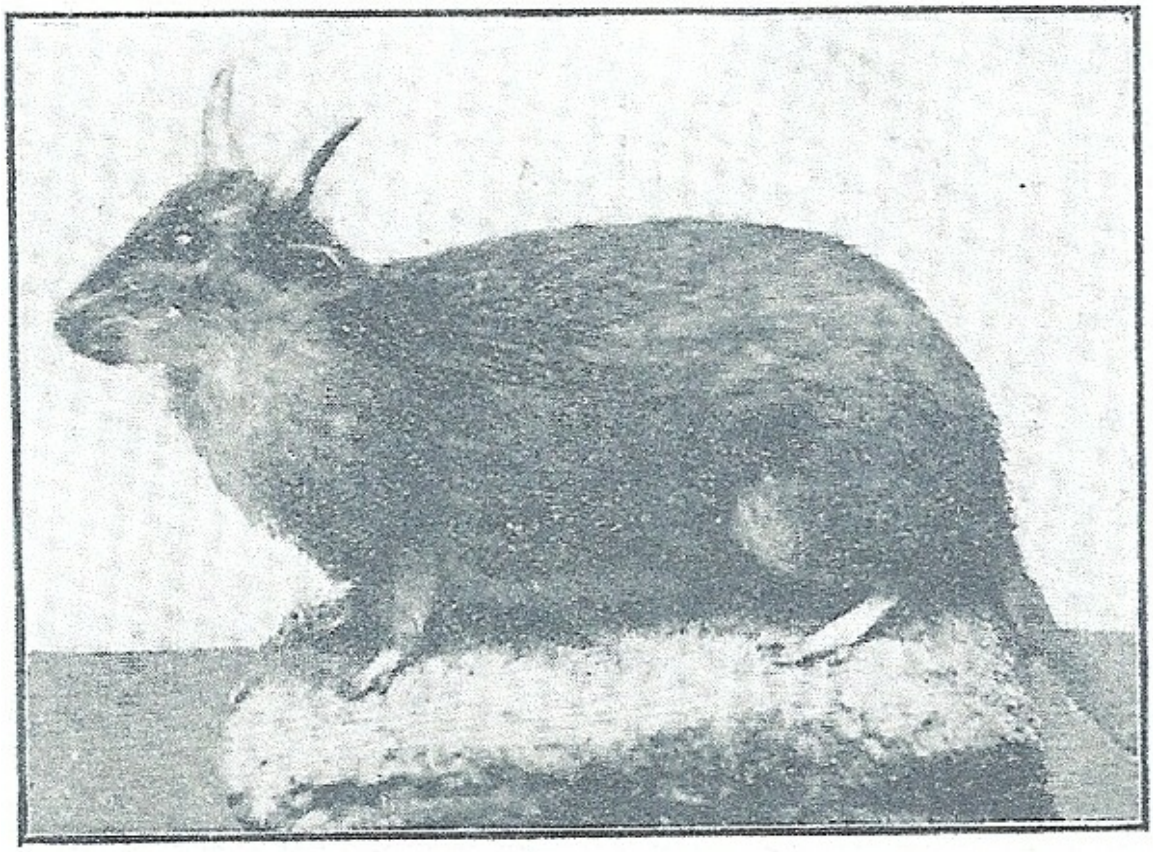

Photo.] *[Thomas Hunt.*

Horned Rat Killed near Evesham.

In the Spring of 2013 Bob Skinner provided me and the Fortean zoological community in general some interesting data on a cryptid new to me - the Horned Rat. The following pages consist of all I know about this creature between 1857 and 1912 after which the trail seems to grow cold. The 1857 account is from the U.S (via a French paper)the **Janesville Morning Gazette** March 11th 1857 p. 12:

"Zoological- Did you ever hear of a horned rat? Last Monday the police court was occupied by a case brought by a scientific man against a Zouave[1] for selling him two horned rats, and cheating him out of twenty dollars. As the prosecutor gave in his evidence with singular talents, you must let me give the column to him" Messieurs," said the savan, addressing the court, being first duly sworn on the Holy Evangelists to tell the truth…"that man(pointing to the Zouave at the bar with his finger) has cheated me most rascally. That fellow knows I am a student of

[1] French light infantry in N.Africa 1831-1962

botany, mineralogy, geology, conchology,anthropolity, and zoology;and one day he came to see me. Says he `Monsieur, did you ever see a horned rat?` `A horned what?` says I. ` A horned rat` says he. `No` says I . ` and what`s more, I`d like to see the man who had, for neither Buffon, nor Cuvier, nor Lascepede say anything about such an animal. There is not one at the garden of plants, and - he interrupted me, Messieurs, to say `I have got one.` ` Go to the devil,` says I `Come and see for yourself,` says he; `It`s alive and *piert* as a young rhinoceros.`

On we both went , and sure enough in his house I saw a big fat rat, which had on its nose a fur-covered excrescence, which was vertebrated,and - most wonderful of all - the horn was larger at the at the top than at the bottom. The prisoner at the bar took the rat out of the cage, held its mouth, and placed it in my hands. I plunged a pin into the horn, the rat jumped and screamed, blood issued from the wound. `Bon`, says I, `it`s no humbug; the horn is really a part of the body.` I paid fifty francs for the rat and carried it home…I happened to meet an officer who had served long in Africa, and I said to him: `Mon General, you have served a good many years in Africa`. `Alas for me`, says he. `Did you ever hear of horned rats` , says I. `La`, says he `haven`t I; they are as plenty at Algiers as grisotts in Paris`. - `Then`, says I, ` be good enough to explain to me why their offspring never have horns` I told him my story. When I got through I thought he would have died a laughing; he shook , he rolled on the sofa, he cried. `Bon` says I, `I`ve been cheated.` When he became calmer I asked him to explain. `Horned rats,` says he, `are manufactured by the Zouaves, who take two rats, puncture their noses, and graft in each rat`s nose, a portion of the other rat`s tail ,and when the tail adheres to the flesh of the nose the tails are cut, and each rat has a horn" **Paris Cor N.O.Picayune.**" (1)

Northern Argus (Clare, South Australia) 9 May 1873 p.3

A MAKER OF MONSTROSITIES

Paris has just lost another celebrity, one Femorus, whose skill in the manufacture of monstrosities must have made Barnum envious. Femorus first tried his apprentice hand on beasts, and succeeded in concocting no end of two-headed cows, five legged birds, horned rats, and such harmless wonders, which went the round of all the fairs for many years. These, however, at length got stale and unprofitable.Modern civilisation demanded something more attractive, so Femorus turned his cunning to the human race itself. In 1854 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for trying to implant the wings of a swan in the back of a child two years old with the object of making a second cupid! On leaving the prison he recommenced

business by manufacturing all sorts of "natural curiosities" , too ugly to specify, anatomical museums, but the demand not being equal to the supply, he was forced to brush up his ingenuity once more. This time he resolved to operate on himself, and he attempted to engraft the comb of a cock - a Gallic one, of course - on his own head. It was doomed to be his last wonder. The engrafting resulted in abcess, from which he died after a fortnight`s suffering. At least, so the Paris papers tell us. - **Echo** (2)

Wellington…Mr Hookway of Marian`s Buildings, has added a very peculiar curiosity to his household possessions a horned rat. I hope it is the only one of its species. Rats I detest, but horned ones would be worse. I have not seen the animal. Which is being stuffed by Mr Palfrey, but I understand its top front teeth have grown to the back of its mouth, and one of them coming through,has grown and formed what appears to be a horn, very like a ram`s horn. Well I`m very glad indeed Mr. Hookway caught it and hope we shall not be favoured with any more of its kind,or Wellington will not be an ideal dwelling for one of its community. **Western Times** April 25th 1902 p. 12

The following is the text accompanying the photo on page 41:

The Countryside Magazine, Vol 3 p. 326, 28th April ,1906

A Horned Rat. - One`s natural impulse on seeing such a photograph as this of a stuffed rat, is to suppose that the taxidermist has played a practical joke; but the following correspondence regarding it justifies our publication of the picture. The first notice of the creature came to us on January 10th from Mr, B,Taylor,Arrow, Alcester, as follows:-

"At Harrington, near Evesham, during early part of December last a doe rat with two solid horns slightly curved measuring 1 ¼ inch long and 5/8 in round at base, was killed. Must have been a formidable creature."

Next on January 24th came the following from Mr Thomas Hunt,naturalist, Church St, Alcester: - " Have forwarded you a photo of a most curious horned rat killed at Norton, near Evesham. I should think it would be very interesting in your COUNTRY-SIDE, which I often take, and should be glad to hear from you."

Further enquiry brought this on February 10th from Mr T.Perry,Norton, near Evesham, who killed the rat: -

“Dear Sir, - Of course the rat had the horns on when alive as they were on when I killed it at Harvington,near Evesham , on November 10th, 1905. And we have seen a photo of it and it`s very good indeed . Just like a rat now it`s preserved, - Believe me, yours truly, T.Perry.

P.S - there were more men working with me at the time it was killed and several saw it before we had it preserved.

Washington Post March 26th 1907 p. 6

A Kansas man asserts that he recently saw a rat with horns. As the authorities insist that the prohibition law is being enforced in Kansas, there must be something wrong with the soda water in that State.

Same or similar paragraph also in

Piqua Leader-Dispatch (Ohio) April 1st 1907

Ukiah Dispatch Democrat (California) April 3rd 1907

Attica Fountain Warren Democrat (Indiana) April 4th 1907

Ardmre Daily Ardmorite (Oklahoma) April 8th 1907

Clinton Plain Dealer (Indiana) May 3rd 1907 p. 7

Checotah Times (Oklahoma) May 10th 1907

Milford Mail (Indiana) November 3rd 1907

Des Moines Daily News (Indiana) May 12th 1912 p.12:

AND KANSAS IS DRY

A Kansas man asserts that he recently saw a rat with horns.

UNIDENTIFIED SUBMARINE OBJECTS: CASE-STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

NICK REDFERN

Unidentified Submarine Objects: Case-studies from around the world

By Nick Redfern

When Richard Muirhead asked me if I would be interested in submitting a paper – on the subject of Unidentified Submarine Objects (USOs) – for the latest issue of his *Flying Snake* magazine, I didn't waste any time in saying 'yes'. And for one very good reason: I have many such reports in my files demonstrating that the oceans of our world are deeply weird places, indeed. It's probably fair to say I have enough cases on-file to write a complete book on the subject, but space issues mean I'm going to limit myself to just a few of the most intriguing USO-based accounts and incidents I have on file.

Bloop: beast, unknown craft, or a fuss about nothing?

During the 1960s, the U.S. Navy created a vast array of underwater microphones, or hydrophones, around pretty much the entirety of the planet. The reason was as simple as it was deeply secret: to keep careful track of the movements of the Soviet Union's fleet of submarines, many of which were armed with sizable numbers of nuclear warheads. The project became known as SOSUS, or Sound Surveillance System.

To this very day – even though the Cold War is now long over and done with – the listening stations are still in place, hundreds of meters below the surface of the world's oceans, at depths where sound waves become trapped

in a layer of water known as the Deep Sound Channel. It's here that temperature and pressure cause sound waves to keep moving without being wildly scattered by the ocean surface or bottom. As for those sounds detected by SOSUS, most can be traced back to everyday things like whales, ships and even earthquakes. It's much the same for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an agency within the U.S. Government's Department of Commerce. Back in the summer of 1997, however, things were far from being everyday in nature. NOAA's Equatorial Pacific Ocean autonomous hydrophone – which was created to augment the Navy's SOSUS program and plays a key role in monitoring populations and migrations of deep-sea animals – detected a strange anomaly at a remote point in the South Pacific Ocean, west of the southern tip of South America. It was an anomaly that suggested deep in the oceans huge, terrifying monsters may lurk about which the U.S. Government knows a great deal. Or didn't suggest that, depending on whose version of events you accept as being valid.

Within official circles, the anomaly became infamously known as Bloop, and according to NOAA's records was detected quickly in frequency for around sixty seconds and was of enough amplitude to be detected on sensors ranging over 5,000 km. Not only that, the sonic frequencies that were monitored convinced some within officialdom that if a living, breathing thing really was roaming the waters off South America, then, as the recordings suggested, it was clearly bigger than any recognized or categorized creature of the sea. Was a marauding monster of massive proportions on the loose? Had H.P. Lovecraft's terrifying, giant-octopus-like Cthulhu coiled its way out of the realm of horror fiction and into the world of reality?

One of the first suggestions put forward by those that felt, or suspected, the Bloop recordings just might be evidence of a huge beast swimming deep in the oceans of our world was that it was a giant squid. And, by that, we're talking the giant of all giants. Certainly, squid can grow to impressive sizes: current estimates are between thirty-three to forty-six feet, although unverified reports of sixty foot long monsters do exist. Might Bloop have been an even bigger beast, the definitive granddaddy of the squid world?

Certainly, within the domain of adventurous fiction, giant squids grow to massive sizes, such as those that took on Captain Nemo and his crew in Jules Verne's classic novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*; the one that caused death and mayhem in *Beast*, a novel by *Jaws* author Peter Benchley; and that which provoked terror for the white sperm whale-obsessed Captain Ahab in the pages of Herman Melville's acclaimed *Moby-Dick*. Fantasy is one thing; but what about reality? Comments and observations – some controversial and others less so – were soon forthcoming. Phil Lobel, a marine-biologist at Boston University, Massacusetts, was skeptical of the giant squid theory. He noted that cephalopods lack gas-filled sacs, thus preventing them from making noise. But Lobel didn't dismiss the fact that something occurred. Rather significantly, he did admit that, while in his opinion the source of the strange recording was not a huge squid, it probably was something biological in origin.

Christopher Fox, of NOAA's Portland, Oregon facility, confirmed that other such anomalies had been recorded over the years, and across the planet, and had been given a variety of names, such as Gregorian Chant, Upsweep, Slowdown, Whistle, and Train. Interestingly, Fox did not discount the possibility of the Bloop signal coming from a living creature, as its signature

was, he explained, somewhat akin to a fast variation in frequency to the sounds made by known and identified animals of the oceans.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of NOAA, at least, the matter has now, finally, been laid to rest. The official stance, today, is that the mysterious sounds recorded in 1997 are not unlike what one would expect to encounter in the fracturing and cracking of large icebergs. NOAA adds that the iceberg they believe caused all the fuss back then was most likely situated somewhere between Brasnfield Straits and the Ross Sea, or possibly at Cape Adare, a well known source of what are termed cryogenic signals.

And that's where matters presently, and officially, stand regarding the Bloop signal of 1997. Unless, of course, you subscribe to the theory that, perhaps, H.P. Lovecraft's fictional Cthulhu is not quite so fictional, after all. Or that the U.S. Government is hiding the truth about terrible, marauding beasts that lurk in the deep, ancient waters of our planet.

Terror at the cove

In 1997, a strange event occurred in the English west-country that had at its heart a definitive USO angle. It all began on October 1, 1997, as Nigel Wright of the Exeter Strange Phenomena Research Group reveals:

'Approximately three weeks ago two young men were swimming in Otter Cove [, Lyme Bay, Exmouth]. As darkness drew in, they decided to make for the shore and change to go home. As they got changed, one of them looked out to sea. He saw what he described as a "greenish" light under the surface. He called to the other young man and they both watched as this light "rose" to the surface of the water. The next thing they knew there was a very bright light shining into their faces. They turned the scene and fled.'

Meanwhile, on the top of the cliffs, equally strange things were afoot. The two young men raced for the car of a relative and breathlessly explained what

had happened. Incredibly, she, too, had seen something highly unusual in in precisely the same time frame on the road leading to Otter Cove: a strange animal that she likened to ‘an enormous cat’. Whatever the origin of the beast, however, she was certain of one thing: it was, to quote her, ‘all lit up’ – glowing almost.

On the following day, a dead whale was found washed upon the beach below the cliffs. This did not appear to have been merely a tragic accident, however. On receiving reports that a whale had been found in precisely the area that anomalous lights and a strange creature were seen, Nigel Wright launched an investigation.

‘The first thing that struck me as I looked on at this scene,’ recalls Wright, ‘was how perfect the carcass was. There was no decay or huge chunks torn from it. Then, as I wandered around it, I noticed that there was only one external wound: in the area of the genitals a round incision, the size of a large dinner plate, was cut right into the internal organs of the mammal. The sides of this incision were perfectly formed, as if some giant apple corer had been inserted and twisted around; from the wound hung some of the internal organs. I quizzed the official from English Heritage, who was responsible for the disposal of the carcass. He informed me that no natural predator or boat strike would have caused this wound. As I looked at this sight, the first thing that came into my mind was how this looked just like the cattle mutilation cases of recent times.’ Wright was also able to determine that this was not the only time that unusual lights had been seen in the vicinity of Lyme Bay.

‘No precise date can be given for the evening when a fishing boat encountered a strange light over Lyme Bay,’ explains Wright, ‘but, since this was told to me by the skipper of the vessel concerned, I can vouch for

its authenticity. The vessel in question was five miles off Budleigh Salterton. The crew became aware of a bright, white-blue light which hovered some distance from the boat. At first they thought it was a helicopter but they heard no engine sounds, nor saw any navigation lights.'

Wright was told by the captain of the vessel that the night had been 'bright and clear' and that if the object had made any noise, it would certainly have been 'audible for miles'.

'The light remained stationary for about one and a half hours. Judging by the mast of their vessel, which is twenty-eight feet high, the crew estimated that the light was not much higher than that,' adds Wright. 'It then very suddenly disappeared.' The mutilators, however, did not disappear – far from it, in fact. **USOs and a mysterious island**

Puerto Rico, or to give it its correct title, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, is what is known as an unincorporated territory of the United States, located in the Caribbean Sea. And according to some, it may very well be the one place – possibly more than any other on the planet - that is home to not just one secret base, but to an overwhelming plethora of classified locations, certainly of a governmental nature, and maybe even of an alien nature, too. Over the course of the last twenty-years or so, the people of Puerto Rico have been swamped by a multitude of UFO encounters, sightings of strange and unearthly-looking craft surfacing from both mountainous and cavernous lairs, and run-ins with strange, vampire-style creatures that one might accurately describe as the distinctly evil-twin to Steven Spielberg's benign E.T.: the Chupacabras. And then there are the USOs of Puerto Rico.

In 2004, when I visited Puerto Rico for the first time – in search of the Chupacabras - I was told of the account of a former civil-defence

employee, who had seen a gigantic, unknown craft rise silently out of the coastal waters of the island, while he was on an early-morning jog in the spring of 1999. In this case, the vast device, which was viewed at a distance of around half-a-mile off the coast, or perhaps slightly more, wobbled slightly – rather like a falling-leaf - as it took to the skies, and then streaked vertically at a fantastic speed, before finally vanishing from view as it grew ever smaller, and was finally lost due to the effects of the bright, rising sun.

Further rumors of a potentially-related nature were also provided to me on that same expedition to the island. They came from a retired police-officer who had heard rumors to the effect that, somewhere off the coast of Puerto Rico – he was not entirely sure where exactly – in late-1993, elements of the U.S. Navy spent several days tracking, via sonar, the movements of a huge USO in the deep waters off Puerto Rico. Perhaps aware of its potentially hazardous nature, the U.S. Navy contingent was ordered to merely carefully log the movements of the undersea craft, but never to engage it any way, shape or form whatsoever that might be interpreted as hostility.

Taking the above into thoughtful consideration, is it truly feasible that Puerto Rico might be home to a massive undersea installation? When one realizes that we, the Human Race, have had the ability to construct such science-fiction-like facilities for decades, then the possibility becomes all-too-real, and not so unbelievable, after all. And, make no mistake: evidence of our very own undersea abilities is far from lacking.

For example, an October 1966 document prepared by one C.F. Austin, of the U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Station at China Lake, California, includes a truly remarkable statement. Titled Manned Undersea Structures – The Rock-Site Concept, it states in part that: ‘Large undersea installations with a shirt-sleeve environment have existed under the continental shelves for many decades. The technology now exists, using off-the-shelf petroleum, mining,

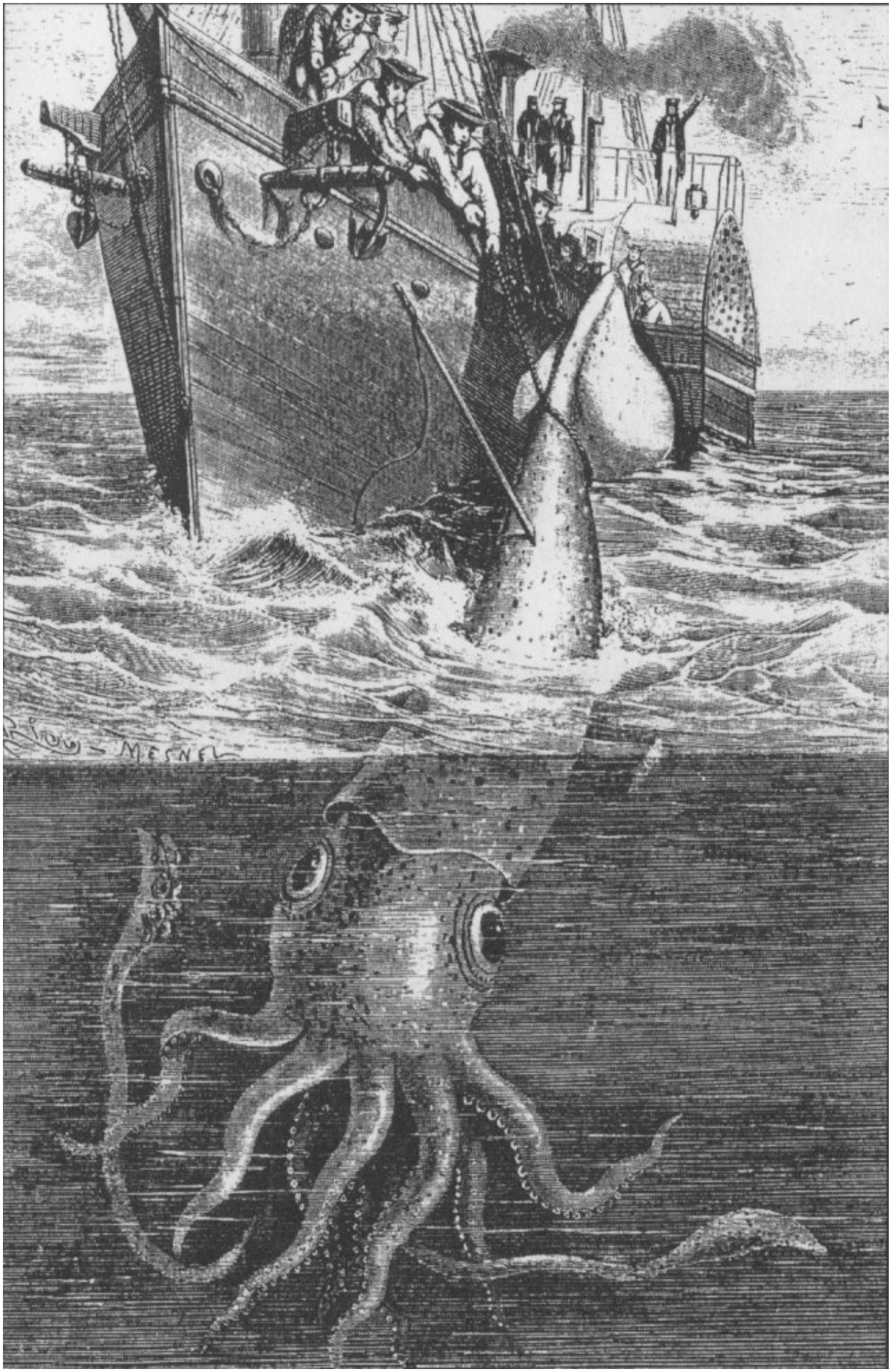

Fig 1 Giant Squid, Harper Lee, 1884

submarine, and nuclear equipment, to establish permanent manned installations within the sea floor that do not have any air umbilical or other connection with the land or water surface, yet maintain a normal one-atmosphere environment within.'

If, as this previously-classified U.S. Navy document demonstrates, the government of the United States was constructing undersea installations - with a comfortable shirt-sleeve environment, no less – a number of decades before the documentation was even prepared in the mid-1960s, perhaps someone else, someone from a world far, far away, has secretly been doing likewise. And, maybe, they chose Puerto Rico as their secret base of both underground and undersea operations.

A triangle of undersea puzzles

Extending from Bermuda in the north to southern Florida, and then east to a point through the Bahamas past Puerto Rico and then back again to Bermuda, is a truly ominous realm of wild, churning and turbulent waters known infamously as the Bermuda Triangle, a permanent fixture in the western part of the North Atlantic Ocean, and one that has become renowned for the hundreds of aircraft, ships, boats and unfortunate souls that have disappeared in the area without trace – and for decades, too.

Fig 2

Puerto Rican waters

© Nick Redfern

Down to earth explanations for such vanishings, it goes without saying, most certainly proliferate. Compass malfunctions, disorientation, sudden and violent bouts of severe weather, mechanical and electrical failure, and pilot error are just some of the conventional theories that have been offered as answers relative to why there should have been so many disappearances in such a clearly delineated area over so many years. But, not everyone is quite so sure that those particular theories provide all the clues to solving the maritime mystery; one of the reasons being that on numerous occasions USOs have been seen in the area.

One particularly significant case involving a craft of distinctly unknown origin occurred in April 1973 when a Captain Dan Delmonico, a calm and collected character with a fine reputation for being grounded and logical, had an encounter that could be considered anything but grounded and logical. It was around 4.00 p.m., while negotiating the waters of the Gulf Stream, specifically between Great Isaac Light, north of Bimini, and Miami, when Delmonico was amazed by the sight of a large cigar-shaped object - nearly two hundred feet in length, grey in color, and with rounded ends – which shot through the water, not surprisingly amazing and astounding Delmonico in the process. Who, or what, piloted the strange submersible on that April 1973 afternoon remains unknown.

A real-life X-File

Ninety sixty-six saw an unusual event occur at Pasajes, Northern Spain that caught the attention of the Ministry of Defence. From a radio officer attached to the *S.S. Patrick M. Rotterdam*, came the following, which I found in 1997, in a then-newly-released batch of formerly classified

British Ministry of Defence files on UFOs. This case does not involve a USO directly, but since the witnesses were at sea, it may be of some relevance. A letter sent to the MoD by the ship's captain reads thus:

'Perhaps the following will be of some interest to you or Jodrell Bank. Whilst at Anchor at Pasajes, North Spain on 22 April at 2100 Bst in a very clear sky, one of the crew noticed a bright patch in the sky and drew my attention to it. It appeared stationary and squarish, the area being about 4 times the size of a full moon. Several of the crew watched, being interested and of course at anchor, there is very little to do. The patch elongated and became brighter and to our amazement a complete ring, similar to pictures of flying saucers, bright and distinct with dark centre. For several minutes this object remained visible then returned to a patch, receding elongated again. Then it branched out to form a letter M. When the ring was clear it was about [the] same size as a full moon. We know it was not the moon because the moon was in another quadrant and lying on back at [the] same time. The patch receded away into distance. I can assure you none of us were drunk.' And there you have it: a round-up of just a few of the weirder USO-themed reports from my files, all of which suggest maybe it's not to the stars – but to the seas – that we should be looking for the answers concerning the many UFO-themed mysteries that dominate our world.

Nick Redfern is the author of many books, including *Wildman*, *Monster Diary*, and *The Pyramids and the Pentagon*. He can be contacted at nickredfernfortean.blogspot.com

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NOTES AND QUERIES

The following appeared in **Knowledge** magazine in October 26th 1883:

IS THE COMMON EARTHWORM LUMINOUS?

Having had my attention drawn last night(October 8) to some phosphorescent streaks on the road,which had been observed by some friends, I sallied forth with two of my pupils,and having found two streaks,struck some matches with which I provided myself, and found that the phenomena proceeded from what were apparently two small earthworms. Is the common earthworm luminous, or is there a special light-giving variety?

They had not the slightest resemblance to glowworms,but were exactly similar, as I have said, to small earthworms. J.J.C. Fenton. (1)

THE FERAL SCARLET MACAWS OF KIRKBY STEPHEN,CUMBRIA

The Guardian March 14th 2013

From the moment the nerve-jangling screeches – on a par with the sound of glass stoppers turning in the necks of bottles – were unleashed from the rooftops, it was obvious which of the shoppers in the street were local residents and which were first time visitors. The former went about their business without an upward glance; the latter stopped in their tracks,stared upwards, then reached for their cameras. Kirkby Stephen`s small flock of scarlet macaws has been a raucous feature of the town ever since the late John Strutt began to provide a refuge for unwanted parrots on his farm at nearby Eden Place. As a dedicated animal lover and conservationist, Strutt managed his 900 acres using farming methods for the benefit of birds, butterflies and wild flowers, and also indulged his passion for exotic birds, which he could never bear to see confined to an aviary.

Our first encounter with his feral macaws was on a footpath near his farm, where a few feathers left under the trees by a bird preening left us puzzling over who had been the owner of such exotic plumage, all the primary colours from a child`s paintbox. For the most part, the macaws stay close to home in the Eden valley, but they are regular visitors to Kirkby Stephen`s rooftops, where they have become local celebrities. There will be some who will point to the proliferation of troublesome, feral ring-necked parakeets in London and frown on the deliberate introduction of any non-native species, but this population has remained small, stable and local.
As we crossed the road to the bakery, a pair peered down at us from the parapet above, technicolour adornments to grey roofs on a grey day. Then they flew low and fast above cars and lorries along Market Street, trailing long tail plumes and ear-piercing screeches – Amazonia on a bitterly cold Cumbrian afternoon." (2)

AN ANCIENT AFRICAN COIN IN AUSTRALIA

In June 2013 a Fortean news item broke in the mainstream media for a change, concerning a coin from eastern Africa found on an island near Australia`s Northern Territory. Here is how the **CNN** news web-site reported the story on June 27th,(abridged version).
(CNN) - Can a handful of an ancient copper coins from a once-opulent but now abandoned corner of Africa change what we know about Australian history?
A team of researchers is on a mission to find out. With its glimmering wealth, busy harbour and coral stone buildings, the island of Kitwa hosted traders from as far away as China, who would exchange gold,ivory and iron from southern Africa`s interior for Arabian pottery and Indian textiles as well as perfumes, porcelains and spices from the Far East…But interest in this nearly forgotten East African city has resurfaced lately thanks to the mystery surrounding a remarkable discovery thousands of miles away, in a long-abandoned , remote chain

of small islands near Australia`s Northern Territory.

Astonishing Discovery

Back in 1944, an Australian soldier named Maurie Isenberg was assigned to one of the uninhabited but strategically positioned Wessel Islands to man a radar station. One day, whilst fishing on the beach during his spare time, he discovered nine coins buried in the sand. Isenberg stored them in a tin until 1979, when he wondered if they might be worth something and and sent them to be identified.

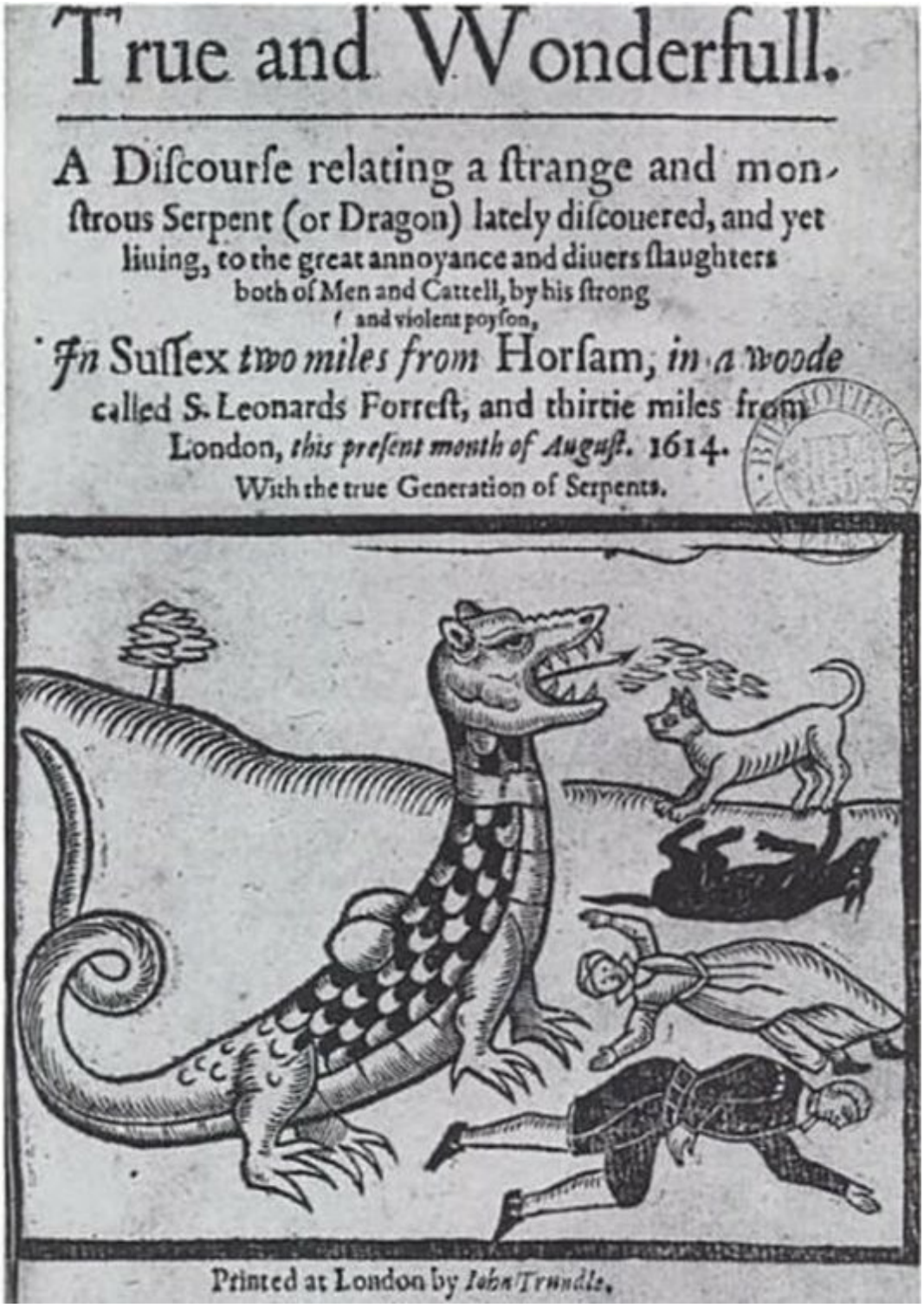
Four of the coins were found to belong to the Dutch East India Company, with one of them being from the late 17th century… " It`s a very fascinating discovery" says Ian McIntosh, an Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis anthropologist.

" Kilwa coins have only ever been found outside of the Kilwa region on one or two occasions" he explains.

" A single coin was found in the ruins of great Zimbabwe and one coin was found in the Arabian Peninsula, in what is now Oman, but nowhere else. And yet, here is now this handful of them in northern Australia, this is the astonishing thing" (3)

Fig 1 Australia`s Northern Territory Wikipedia Creative Commons

FRONT COVER OF A PAMPHLET ON THE HORSHAM "DRAGON" OF 1614


True and Wonderfull.

A Diſcourſe relating a ſtrange and monſtrous Serpent (or Dragon) lately diſcouered, and yet liuing, to the great annoyance and diuers ſlaughters both of Men and Cattell, by his ſtrong and violent poyſon,

In Suſſex *two miles from* Horſam, *in a Woode* called S. Leonards Forreſt, and thirtie miles from London, *this preſent month of Auguſt.* 1614.

With the true Generation of Serpents.

Printed at London by *Iohn Trundle.*

Fig 2 Front page of pamphlet depicting Horsham Serpent. It looks crocodile-like to me. Thanks to Bob Skinner for providing this.

A BEAR-DOG HYBRID?

The following article appeared in the **Weekly Reno Gazette** of November 22nd 1883:

A QUEER CASE

EVIL ASSOCIATIONS CORRUPT GOOD MORALS[1]

On a ranch near Petaluma is an animal that is unmistakably a cross between a California brown bear[2] or a cinnamon bear and a dog. It was caught when young in the mountains near Salinus, fourteen years ago, and has been kept by its present owners ever since. The *Courier* says of it : In colour and appearance, when laying down, it would be taken for a bear, but when standing the dog cross is plainly visible. The head and tail show the bruin and feet are about half bear and half dog, except the crook of the hind-leg, which is longer and more dog-like. His habits are more of the bear order, being morose and sulky, and during the Winter inclined to sleep, and is ugly when disturbed. His bark is that of a Newfoundland dog, while his growl is that of a bear. Altogether it is a singular beast and an animal cross we never supposed existed. (4)

plus

= ?

Fig 3 and *Fig 4*

Brown bear and Newfoundland dog.Images from Wikipedia Creative

[1] This is the real headline,not me moralising!

[2] The last Californian Brown Bear became extinct in 1922

Here is the exchange of messages on Facebook about this supposed bear-dog hybrid:

Richard Muirhead (May 5th 2013) : Has a cross between a bear and a Newfoundland dog ever been reported?

Martin Kilmer-True: Wat

Kirst Mason D`Raven: You mean something that looks like a cross between a Newfoundland and a bear?

Seamus Ehrhard: Yes, the great New-Bear has been sighted but never officially documented.

Matija Bobi: Bear and Newfoundland genes just wont splice.

Richard Muirhead: Hi Kirst yes that`s right (without giving the whole say (I meant story) away as its coming out in no. 5 of my magazine Flying Snake) I found a story in an old U.S paper c. 1891 of a cross between the now extinct Californian brown bear and a Newfoundland. Please can you tell me more about the great New - Bear Seamus?

Richard Muirhead: whole STORY I meant!

Tim Bergmann: I`m certain that`s genetically impossible.

Seamus Ehrhard: I`m actually not allowed to comment on the matter since a paper is now in review

Richard Muirhead: I am sure you are right Tim, I`m not saying it actually did happen, just that it was reported to have happened.

Richard Muirhead: OK Thanks Seamus.

Tim Bergmann: Richard I see…but there have always been such funny reports all around the world(not only at April 1st)…it`s just impossible…that`s all…probably a hoax.

David Smith: I`ve seen the photo pretty sure its photo shopped

Kirst Mason D`Raven: Is this stemming from the folklore that the Newfoundland dog breed originally came from the Viking `Bear Dogs`?

Johan Schmooley Moufasa: Absolutely impossible genetically. Pure fallacy.

Richard Muirhead: I don`t recall seeing a photo, this was in 1891 remember. You must be thinking of something else David. (5)

HARE AT SEA

The Countryman Spring 1982 page 136

Some friends, returning from a November sea-fishing trip east of Worthing, went to investigate a small animal swimming about 100 yards offshore. When they got it aboard, they were surprised to find it was a hare. Far from being grateful for its rescue, it dashed wildly around the boat until it managed to escape overboard. They continued towards the shore and the hare followed them in. When another group of fishermen approached the hare, as it was recovering in the shelter of a groyne, it speedily made off up the pebble beach,ran several hundred yards along the main road, then turned up a side-road towards the downs. During the whole episode the hare did not appear to be in any distress except when approached or interfered with. We wondered whether it could have been carried out to sea through one of the drainage pipes - Mr & Mrs K.E. Weller, Sussex. [Winwood Reade, who has been studying the brown hare for some years, tells me she has not heard of a parallel occurrence, although hares are known to be good swimmers in fresh water and the early nineteenth-century naturalist Yarrell saw one cross `an arm of the sea a mile broad`. -B.C] (6)

A BLACK CAT IN QUEENSLAND

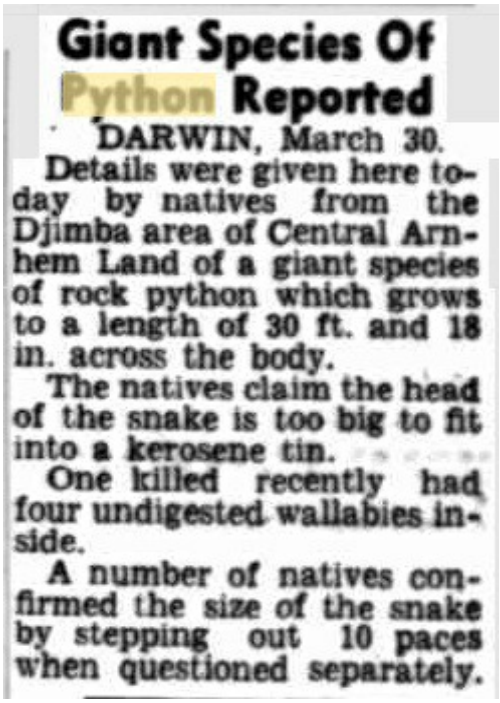
STRANGE ANIMAL SHOT

The Brisbane Courier September 17th 1924

Some days ago, writes our Tenterfield correspondent,Maurice Clark, the son of Mr A.Clark,of Steinbrook, shot a strange animal near his home,which has caused considerable speculation amongst local residents. The boy was out shooting, when he noticed something move near a log. He fired a bullet into animal, which immediately turned on him, and assumed such a ferocious aspect that he quickly returned home and informed his father. Mr Clark went out and killed the animal, which was of the cat species,and about the size of a full-grown fox. It was pure black in colour,and covered with a long fur,besides having a long thin tail. No local bushmen have ever seen anything of the kind before. What is believed to be the mate of the animal, which has been destroyed, can be heard at night in the vicinity of Steinbrook howling weirdly. Residents in the vicinity are somewhat afraid of it, and many shooting parties have been organised in the hope of destroying it, but without success so far. Some members of Wirth`s Circus have expressed the opinion that possibly the animal was a young puma. (7)

GIANT SPECIES OF PYTHON REPORTED

The Advertiser, Adelaide ,March 31st 1953



Giant Species Of Python Reported

DARWIN, March 30.

Details were given here today by natives from the Djimba area of Central Arnhem Land of a giant species of rock python which grows to a length of 30 ft. and 18 in. across the body.

The natives claim the head of the snake is too big to fit into a kerosene tin.

One killed recently had four undigested wallabies inside.

A number of natives confirmed the size of the snake by stepping out 10 paces when questioned separately.

This white shark was caught off the coast of
Cuba in the mid 1940's.
It weighed an incredible 7,100 pounds and
measured a lenght of 21ft
TO DATE IT IS THE RECORD CATCH

Fig 5 Image of a huge shark, somewhere in Asia, from a Facebook site. I tried to find out who owned the copyright to this but

Three items from **The Metro** June 5th 2013:

ZEBRA FINCHES, ETC:

GENE-IUS: Were you born with your personality or are you parents responsible for it? If zebra finches are to be relied on, its nurture (not nature) that counts. Exeter university researchers found that counts. Exeter university researchers found that finch foster parents exert more influence on behaviour than the birds` genes.

DEATH DUTY: Dying doesn`t stop male Trinidadian guppies having children.But it`s the females who do the hard work.They can store sperm from their recently dec

-eased partners in their reproductive tracts. When they want to conceive,it`s ready on tap, the Royal Society reports.

EARLY BIRDS: City living has changed our day and time activities…and the same can be said for songbirds. They rise earlier than their country cousins and have faster `body clocks`. Urban life has changed their biological rhythms, a German study published by the Royal Society suggests. (8)

A TIGER IN HONG KONG IN 1940

I received the following account via e-mail from Brian Edgar of the Yahoo Stanley P.O.W. Camp group , Hong Kong, 1941-45 .It is the account of someone called Sheridan`s visit to Lantau in 1940,two years before the famous (or should that be infamous?) case of the tigers who visited the camp in May 1942.

James and I were dressed in KD shorts and shirt, walking shoes and I had a small white sun hat. He carried a water bottle and small haversack as well as a camera and binoculars. Towards evening we returned to the Monastery rather leg weary, but having enjoyed our first day on a delightful island. Our monk friend greeted us with two tubs of hot water, in which we had a good wash down and soaked our feet in. After cooking our evening meal we had a rest, and then decided to take our sleeping kit and sleep out on the hill above the Monastery. As we were about to leave, our monk friend came with the Head Monk. Both seemed very agitated and tried to persuade us to stay inside the Monastery compound. In the course of their conservation which was all in Chinese , I could understand the word which meant tiger and by further signs they indicated that there were tigers on the island and that it was dangerous for us to sleep in the open . We of course had never heard of tigers in any part of South China, [1]so we just laughed and prepared to leave. The head Monk then said " man-man" i.e. wait a minute, then fetched two staves about 5ft. long with a wooden shaft and steel point. We took them to please him and made our way up the tracks to where we had decided to sleep. We noticed the gates were closed as we left. It was very pleasant, as darkness set in, we could see the lights of Macau and of ships passing in the distance. James and I slept sound,

[1] This may seem dubious but actually this opinion was surprisingly common in Hong Kong at the time.

although it felt a bit hard underneath. We woke to a fine clear cool morning, picked up our gear and made our way back to the Monastery. They must have had some sort of look-out because we could see a group at the gate as we approached. It was the head Monk who greeted us, and he seemed very agitated. He motioned us to follow him to a sort of shrine which was about 4400 yards outside the Monastery . At the shrine on the ground lay a large Chow dog of which quite a few were kept in the Monastery. It was dead and torn to pieces, the head Monk pointed to it and said one word in Chinese, " tiger". James and I looked at each other, and said, "no more sleeping in the open." (9)

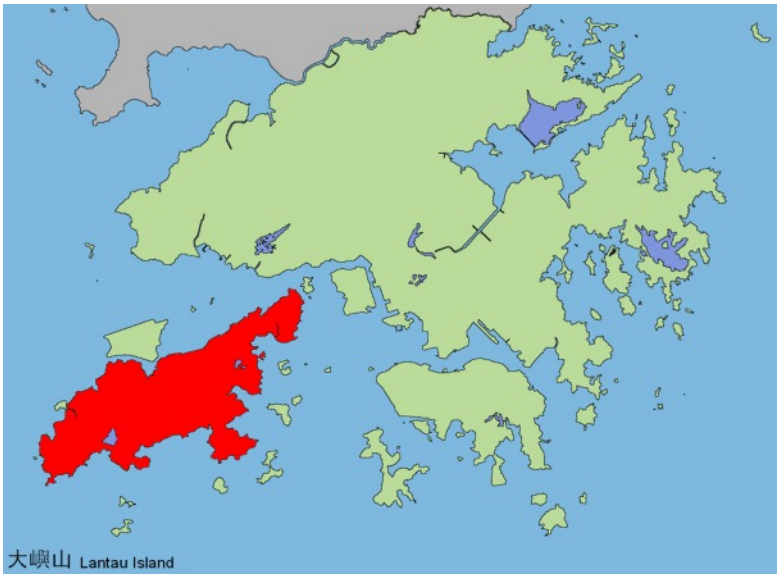


Fig 6 Wikipedia Creative Commons.

Lantau is the large island in the south-west of the picture.

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2. The Guardian March 14th 2013

3. See Ancient coins that could change history of Australia edition.cnn.com/2013/06/25/world/africa/ancient-african-coins-

4 Weekly Reno Gazette November 22nd 1883

5. Facebook communicatons May 5th 2013

6. The Countryman Spring 1982 p. 136

7. The Brisbane Courier September 17th 1924

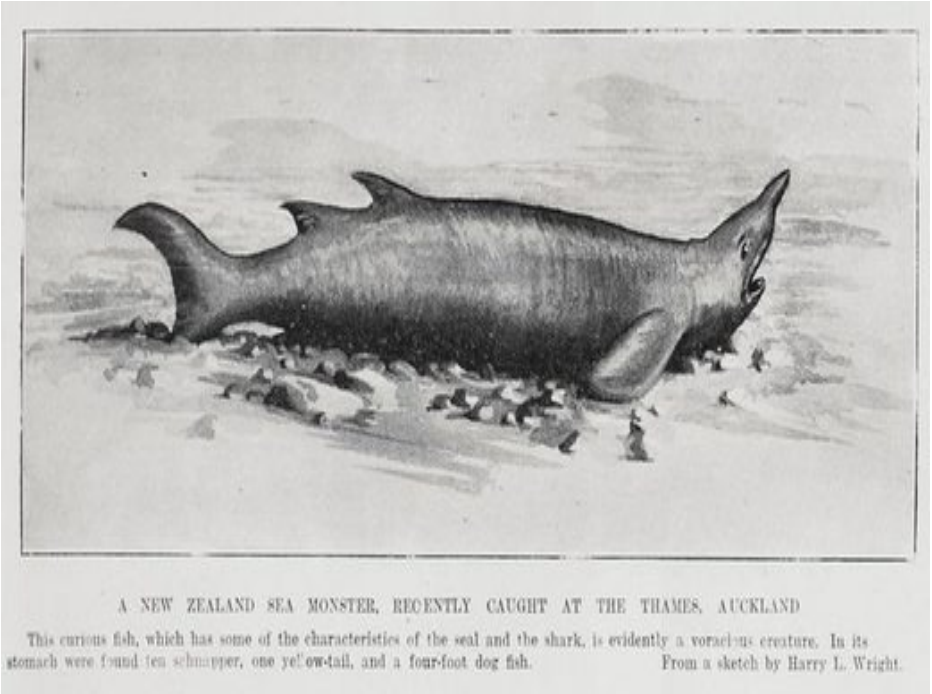
8. The Metro June 5th 2013

9. Yahoo Stanley Camp Forum e-mail from Brian Edgar May 9th 2013

PHOTO OF A COELACANTH TAKEN BY BRITTA RODDE, COMOROS ISLANDS, 1995

Fig 7 © Britta Rodde.

This photo of a coelacanth appeared on Britta Rodde`s Facebook wall and I was kindly given permission to reproduce by her. It was taken in the Comoros Islands in 1995.



A NEW ZEALAND SEA MONSTER, RECENTLY CAUGHT AT THE THAMES, AUCKLAND

This curious fish, which has some of the characteristics of the seal and the shark, is evidently a voracious creature. In its stomach were found ten schnapper, one yellow-tail, and a four-foot dog fish. From a sketch by Harry L. Wright.

Fig 8 The caption under the image, dated 31/10/1901, reads: `A New Zealand Sea Monster Recently Caught At The Thames, Auckland. This curious fish,which has some of the characteristics of the seal and the shark,is evidently a voracious creature. In its stomach were found ten snapper, one yellow tail, and a four foot dog-fish.` On Facebook, Britta Rodde believed it was a basking shark,Paul Fitzpatrick a Greenland Shark

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EXAMPLES OF SOME OF THE STRANGE INSECTS WHICH FELL IN BATH IN 1871 (FROM SCIENCE GOSSIP)

Fig 9

INSECTS AT BATH.

A CORRESPONDENT inquires concerning the nature of the insects which fell lately at Bath. I beg to inclose a photograph of a drawing of them, made by a friend of mine in Bath, a gentleman well versed in natural history.

Fig. 138.

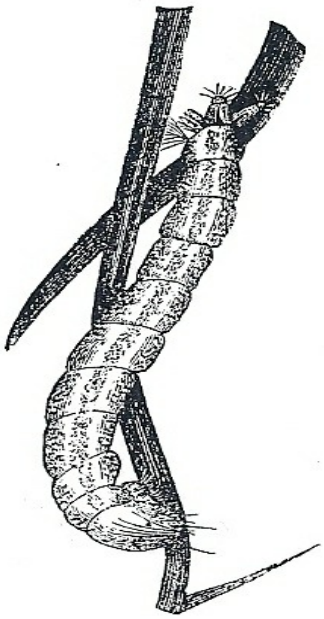

Fig. 139.

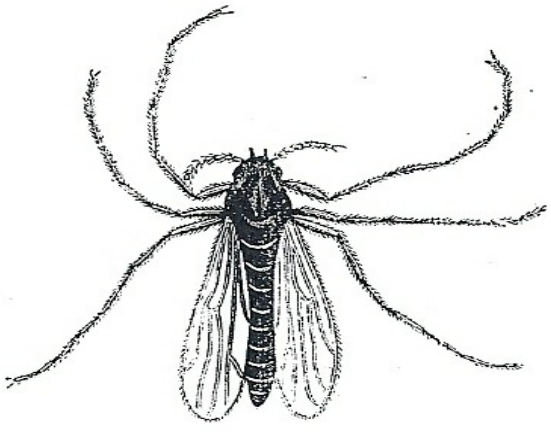

Fig. 140.
Copy from Photograph of insects that fell at Bath.

W. B. GIBBS.

More information about these insects can be found in Charles Fort`s `Book of The Damned`

Letters to Flying Snake

GREY SQUIRRELS - A NEW DISEASE?

May 20th 2013

An interesting contribution from regular Richard George of St Albans on a possible new disease amongst grey squirrels:

Dear Richard

"I`ve been reading a book by Neil Ansell called *Deep Country* ,(Hamish Hamilton,2011), which describes his five years living in an isolated cottage in north Breconshire near the town of Sennybridge. His observation of the natural world around him is both acute and poetic. On pages 70-1 there is a description of an illness in a squirrel which you might find interesting:

I was sitting on my doorstep in the morning sun with my chain file, methodically sharpening my saw, when I noticed something crawling up the hillside towards me. It was a grey squirrel, but its head was swollen,its eyes bulging, and it appeared to be losing control of its limbs. I hadn`t realized that myxomatosis could affect squirrels; or perhaps this was not myxomatosis but an equivalent squirrel disease. It couldn`t support its weight; it was dragging itself up the hill on its belly, but it seemed absolutely determined and it never paused in its struggle…

The squirrel carried on,painfully slowly,irrevocably. Just over the track was an old ash,and there was a hollow in that ash right at ground level. The squirrel crawled into the shelter of that hole, from which it would never emerge. "

A SHOWER OF PERIWINKLES IN WORCESTER IN 1881

On August 17th 2010 I received the following letter from Mike Rowe, Lymington after I began looking into a shower of periwinkles at Worcester on May 28th 1881. I was going to write up my research for the Internatonal Journal of Meteorolgy but I never did.

Dear Richard

"Many thanks for your letter about the shower of periwinkles at Worcester on 28 May 1881. This fall is at least as peculiar as the 1867 shower of nuts in Ireland. (I liked your article on this in *IJ Met* by the way.) There is nothing about the Worcester case in *British Rainfall* for 1881, and there doesn`t seem to be anything in *Symons`s Monthly Meteorological Magazine for 1881* either. It`s clear from British Rainfall that it was a thundery day, with some severe storms in the west Midlands.

The only primary sources I can find is a report from the Worcester Daily Times, 30 May 1881, reproduced in *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders*, by John Michell and Robert J.M. Rickard, Thames and Hudson, 1977. I enclose a photocopy of the whole section `Falls of creatures and organic matter` so that you can judge the general reliability of the book!

I think the case also features in one or more of William Corliss`s books.

If these moluscs actually were periwinkles , then either they came from the sea,by the agency of a tornado, or they were discarded by a local fisherman and the story has been exaggerated. Periwinkles certainly were (and are) eaten. The tornado theory seems impossible to me because of the distance involved. I did wonder,years ago, whether the winkles could have been the land snail *Pomatias elegans,* which looks like a winkle and - unlike almost all land snails - even has an operculum or door with which to close the mouth of the shell,

as a winkle has. (I was very interested in land and freshwater molluscs when I was in the Sixth Form at school, and sent a lot of records to a mapping scheme being conducted by the Conchological Society.) But *P.elegans* is a local species largely confined to limestone, and I doubt whether it`s found within some miles of Worcester. The nearest known location is the Bredon Hills area, c 10 km from Worcester. In any case, it wouldn`t explain the hermit crab mentioned in the press article - although this does sound to me like an embellishment to the story! I`m sure I`ve read somewhere that winkles were found on roofs and walls, but again, how reliable is this information?

On the Web, there is some material in the hypertext edition of Charles Fort`s *Lo!*

I hope this is of interest, and also that you can find other primary sources on this event. Its`fascinating!

Best wishes

Mike

Fig 1 Pomatias elegans. Wikipedia Creative Commons

BOOK REVIEW

Footwear Markings at Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire . A Report for English Heritage. Richard Sheppard Nottingham: Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust. 1997

This utterly vital,groundbreaking and bold report on the increasingly important subject of footwear markings landed on my door mat in September 1997 in Oxford. Richard Sheppard is or was a bit of a Fortean himself .He wrote to me, on the 12th of that month: " Dear Sir, Please find enclosed a copy of a report that I sent to English Heritage earlier this year. Whilst researching the subject of footwear markings on lead roofs, I did send a letter to `Letters to Ambrose Merton` and yours is the first response that I have had - albeit asking for information, rather than offering any! Anyway,what I have written only touches on this interesting subject and here in the context of Bolsover. I have submitted a shortened and revised paper to Derbyshire Archaeological Journal for publication next year. Please note that copyright of this report`s contents lies with us (Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust) and English Heritage.

As regards black squirrels, I`m afraid that I cannot help you there. I`m told that they exist in Russia or the Ukraine, but otherwise I know nothing about them being seen in the U.K. One for the `Fortean Times` I suspect!" Well it is a fascinating document, 25 pages of charts and images ,mainly of outlines of footwear, some with letters on them,others names and dates. The dates range from "at least 1822 to the early 20th century." "By far the majority of the samples were left by men. Of the complete 140 outlines, about 20 were probably left by women, with a similar number being probable youths` shoes. Being of comparable lengths these latter two groups can be difficult to distinguish, although waists and heels are useful pointers…Leaving one`s mark on a lead roof may not have been looked upon as wanton vandalism at this time, as it might today. Inscribing graffiti on deserted old buildings was quite common in the 19th century, but Bolsover Castle has little evidence of defacement on its actual walls…This leaves the intriguing question: was leaving one`s individual mark on the Bolsover roof seen as an innocent activity or was it an act of bedevilment, a way of `cocking a snoop` at a snobbish vicar under his very nose." Fascinating stuff and he`s a Richard, to boot! (Groan!). I wonder if it went to a 2nd edition?

One of a collection of odd coloured moles found in Berkshire in 2012 and passed on to Carl Marshall. See Animals & Men 50 for more info.